

ANNE

BY OLGA HARTLEY

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A NOVEL

BY

OLGA HARTLEY

PHILADELPHIA

J. B. LIPPINCOTT COMPANY

—1920—

TO MY DEAR BROTHER

LYNN

WHO WAS KILLED LEADING HIS MEN INTO ACTION AT THE
BATTLE OF BAPAUME, AUGUST 23RD, 1918, WHILE SERVING
AS SECOND LIEUTENANT IN THE EAST SURREY REGIMENT

"If (according to man) I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what doth it
profit me if the dead rise not again?"—1 Cor. xv. 32.

2136074 !

ANNE

CHAPTER I

A STORM of sleet and rain blurred the windows of the train as Gilbert Trevor travelled from Norfolk to Yorkshire one cold spring day. It was a tiresome cross-country journey and he hated boredom, but his thin young face, already faintly marked with the lines about the eyes and mouth that betoken those who follow the profession of the law, looked out at the wet landscape with an expression of interest that was not excited by the grey skies reflected in the gleaming flooded fields on the plains, nor by the sombre brown moors as he neared his destination. Twice he re-read a letter that he carried in his waistcoat pocket. It was written in a scholarly, difficult scrawl on cheap grey paper.

“ 39 LENNOX TERRACE,
ST. HILDA'S BAY.

DEAR SIRs,

I see in the daily paper some reference to the death of the late Nathaniel Trevor of Crane Hall, Brankburgh. I had not heard of his death or I should have written before. You may or may not be aware that the late Mr. Trevor had, during

his lifetime, made a verbal arrangement with his friend, Colonel O'Shaughnessy, by which he temporarily remitted a certain sum of money due to him. It was a matter of three thousand pounds, and I am bound to own that Colonel O'Shaughnessy regarded himself to be under a strict obligation to repay the debt. When he died suddenly last year I discovered that he had only three thousand and a few odd pounds in the world. I wrote to the late Mr. Trevor asking him to forgo whatever claim he had upon the estate, as there is a child to support and educate. In his will, which I believe to be invalid as it is neither dated nor witnessed, Colonel O'Shaughnessy appointed the late Mr. Trevor to be the child's guardian—this I also mentioned when I wrote, but my letter remained unanswered. I am therefore writing to ask you whether, if you have the intention of calling in money due to the late Mr. Trevor, you will be good enough to waive any legal claim you may have to the three thousand pounds, as the claim, if pressed, will leave an unfortunate orphan practically penniless.

Yours faithfully,

JOHN HALLIDAY.

To the Executors of the late Nathaniel Trevor."

"It is an old tale—and a most unbusinesslike letter," Gilbert Trevor assured himself for the third time; yet at twenty-six he was young enough to be grateful to the unknown writer, even though he proved to be a swindler, for giving him the excuse he had so gladly seized upon for escaping from his grandfather's lawyers, whose unconcealed pity for

his disappointment in his grandfather's estate had galled his pride. He had affronted the Warneford solicitor by evading all discussion about the various ways his grandfather had wasted his money, not that piety prevented him from speaking ill of the dead, but because pride made him reluctant to criticise a member of his own family; and any conversation about his grandfather inevitably led to criticism. He had instructed the agent to let the old house as soon as possible at whatever rent he could get to whatever tenants he could find.

He had no pleasant associations with Crane Hall. His rare visits to his grandfather in his schooldays had not been socially successful. He saw himself a shy, awkward little boy oppressed by the necessity of being on his best behaviour, half-scared by his grandfather's gruff voice and sarcastic tongue. He had no sentimental regrets about letting the place to strangers. Nevertheless he resented the necessity because he felt cheated out of a sensation that would have amused him. It would have interested him to have the house and estate to use and enjoy. There was nothing interesting or amusing in having the possession as a responsibility, in regarding the house with the eyes of a landlord instead of a host. If he could not afford to live in the place, and fill it with congenial people, the sooner Ross and Allendale filled it with tenants who would spare him the necessity of worrying about the expenses of its maintenance the better he would be pleased. Instead of going back to London with a happy sense of power and benevolence assured by the possession of a good income, a large house, and a hospitable disposition, to be congratulated by friends and acquaintances,

he would go back with a sense of failure. His position, instead of being enviable, would be rather foolish ; it was futile, flat, and poor-spirited to own a house one could not set foot in and an income swallowed up by repairs to roofs and railings.

In his grandfather's desk an I.O.U. for three thousand pounds signed by Terence Edward O'Shaughnessy had been discovered in an old notebook. Gilbert had searched in vain for some clue to it. Nathaniel Trevor had not been the man to cherish old letters ; his desk contained nothing but orchid-importers' lists, prospectuses of speculative companies, the pedigrees of some prize bulls, and a copy of the rules of the Constitutional Club. None of these documents threw any light on Colonel O'Shaughnessy and his affairs. Gilbert had put the I.O.U. in his pocket, and resolved to go to Yorkshire, confront John Halliday, whoever he was, and demand the three thousand pounds, unless Mr. Halliday on his side could produce an authenticated orphan. He profoundly disbelieved in the orphan's existence, but his sudden decision to go to St. Hilda's Bay had cheered him. It was an excellent excuse for getting away immediately from a house in which he did not wish to spend another twenty-four hours, and from circumstances that held no zest for him. An excursion after an unknown man who, for an unknown reason, was endeavouring to defraud him would be a more entertaining adventure to relate than dispiriting interviews with agents, and bankers, and solicitors.

As Gilbert's train neared the Yorkshire coast the clouds broke into dishevelled masses, and a pale sunshine lit up the desolate moors and flooded St. Hilda's Bay with an amber sunset light when

he arrived in the late afternoon at the station by the harbour.

The old fishing town lies low round the sheltered quays: the little red-roofed houses all lying close together as if for companionship's sake, and friendliness, and for fear of the fierce North Sea and the wild north winds. The new town, tall grey houses in terraces and crescents with great hotels, stands high up on the West Cliff, facing the open sea and turning its back on the faded red roofs, the green pool of the harbour, and the uneven old stone quays. Gilbert walked up to the hotel recommended by the station-master, past the harbour where the fishing-boats were moored in a tangle of ropes and masts and furled brown sails. A crowd of restless sea-gulls in a state of delirious excitement circled shrieking overhead, and the salt air was strongly flavoured with the smell of fish and tar.

Gilbert engaged a room at the White Hart, the large white hotel perched on the cliff above the crazy jumble of red roofs; then he went forth to find Lennox Terrace.

Following the directions of the hotel porter, he bore away from the aristocratic crescent of hotels and boarding-houses facing the sea, and, turning through various by-ways, he found Lennox Terrace to be a long steep street curving down from the prosperous heights of the West Cliff towards the crazy little yards and slums of the old town, which, viewed from the top of the hill, had the appearance of a very badly made patchwork quilt. In Lennox Terrace all the red-brick villas were exactly alike in structure, from the chimney-pots to the cheap cast-iron railings round the six-foot-deep front gardens. Every house dis-

played a card to advertise rooms to let. Some of them had green cards with "Apartments" in gold letters, others white cards with "Lodgings" in black letters; those were the only differences between one house and another, except that some of the tiny gardens had a wind-blown shrub in the centre of a patch of grass, or an empty flower-bed, and other gardens were merely plots of shingle. Number 39 had the same appearance as every other house in the street, the appearance of poverty—not the picturesque, grinning, unabashed poverty of the courts and alleys by the harbour side, but the shame-faced, worried, shrinking poverty that is unhappily struggling not to recognise nor divulge its own existence.

The bell at Number 39 seemed to be broken, so Gilbert knocked on the door, which was opened presently by a small middle-aged woman with bright black eyes and the scantiest allowance of hair he had ever seen on a female head.

"Does Mr. John Halliday live here?" enquired Gilbert.

"Yes he does." But the woman seemed more inclined to shut the door than to open it further.

"Is he in?"

"Where do you come from?" enquired the custodian of the house. The question was obviously the result of caution and not curiosity. Gilbert was relieved to find that "Brankburgh, Norfolk" reassured her. She stood aside and let him into a narrow passage papered with a varnished paper that simulated some hideous marble that was never quarried on this planet. The atmosphere was pervaded by a curious smell that contained, among other

ingredients, dried haddock, boiled cauliflower, and escaping gas. The woman then asked his name, and a look of interest and excitement lit up her face at the word "Trevor." She opened the nearest door, put her head into a room and drew it back as quickly as if something inside had tried to bite her.

"He'll be upstairs, if you don't mind the stairs."

Correctly interpreting this sentence as an invitation to follow her to a floor above, Gilbert went up two flights of creaking stairs carpeted with a narrow strip of linoleum worn into a hole on each step. On the second floor she tapped at a door, opened it three inches, called in :

"Here's Mr. Trevor from Norfolk come to see you," and ushered Gilbert into Mr. Halliday's bedroom.

A tall young man with rough fair hair, wearing a shabby tweed suit, started up to greet him—a surprised young man of about twenty-three.

"Awfully glad to see you ! Awfully sorry the room is in such a beastly mess. How do you do ? "

"Are you Mr. John Halliday ? "

Gilbert had pictured an older, more hardened sinner, and the untidy young man's boyish, clean-shaven face had a good forehead, honest brown eyes, and a straight-lipped steady mouth.

"I am ; I suppose you've come in answer to my letter ? Jolly good of you to fag all this way. Where'll you sit ? Take the chair, won't you ? "

There was one chair in the room, a table covered with an untidy mass of papers, a triangular tin washing-stand, which apparently served Mr. Halliday as a hat-rack too, as a cap hung on a corner of it, a bed, also covered with papers and books, and a deal chest of drawers in a similar plight. There were also

papers in the chair, but Mr. Halliday tilted them on to the floor.

"I'm editor of the *St. Hilda's Bay Gazette*," he explained with an odd mixture of modesty and importance. "That's why the place gets snowed under like this. Now what can I offer you?"

Having made the hospitable suggestion Mr. Halliday looked round the little room with some perplexity; except the water in the jug in the washing-stand, and the soap, there didn't seem anything to offer.

"Nothing, thanks. You'll forgive me coming without warning, but . . ."

"That's all right—most sporting of you, and jolly kind."

"I'm the late Mr. Trevor's grandson and heir."

"I hope you didn't mind me writing about that money? I thought there was no harm in asking, you know."

"That, of course, is what I've come about. I didn't understand your letter."

"I suppose you wondered where I came in? Of course, it isn't my business at all really—only you see, in a sort of way I happen to be in charge of Colonel O'Shaughnessy's orphan—had to have a shot at doing the best for the kid."

"Your letter didn't explain a word about the child, neither age nor sex nor anything."

"That was my artfulness," explained John Halliday with a cheerful, guileless grin. "It seemed to me only fair to you that the case should be decided on its own merits and not on the merits of the orphan."

Gilbert began to like the untidy young man.

"As a lawyer I appreciate your point; but if I guarantee to decide the case on its merits, will you agree to satisfy my curiosity as a man and produce the orphan?"

"No difficulty about that—she'll produce herself at tea-time. She's a girl—fifteen on her last birthday, and her name is Anne. She doesn't know anything about this business—she's only a kid."

"What exactly is this business? I mean, have you any idea how the debt of three thousand pounds was contracted?"

"Oh yes, it was a gambling debt," said John Halliday airily, quite unconscious of the unpleasantness of the surprise his words inflicted upon his visitor. "Those two old gentlemen, Colonel O'Shaughnessy and your grandfather, seem to have gone in for it hot and strong—played cards for any old stake, every penny they'd either of them got, and in the long run the Colonel got the worst of it."

"I'd no idea," began Gilbert, both annoyed and confused. "Of course in that case I shouldn't dream of claiming—of profiting. . . ."

John Halliday glanced at him quickly and sympathetically.

"Colonel O'Shaughnessy never had any idea of repudiating the debt," he said. "He said it was a debt of honour and his one thought was to win enough money off someone else to pay it."

"I never met Colonel O'Shaughnessy, never heard of him—hadn't seen my grandfather since I was a schoolboy, owing to family rows, so I don't know anything of his affairs," Gilbert explained, his personal pride on the defensive. "Of course the debt is cancelled."

“You’ve only my word for it so far,” pointed out John Halliday. “Look here, it’s cold up here. Let’s go downstairs where there’s a fire and I’ll tell you all I know about the business. It’s like old Mother Mugford to bring you up here, instead of putting you into the dining-room and calling me down.”

He clattered downstairs into the room with the little bow-window—a room cheaply furnished with odds and ends of furniture, bits of household wreckage salvaged from second-hand sale-rooms. But there was a cheerful fire, and preliminary signs of a forthcoming meal on the table, which was covered with a white cloth—odd cups with saucers that didn’t match each other on a black tray, and a plate of thick slices of bread and butter.

There were two arm-chairs by the fire, springless, with stuffing exuding through gaps in the torn leather covering, and rents mended inadequately with black cotton. John Halliday drew forward for Gilbert the one that he assured him was the most comfortable, and lay back in the other himself.

“I first met the old blighter two years ago, in the British Museum Reading-room,” he began. “He, Colonel O’Shaughnessy, you know, was sitting next to me. I was looking up some mediæval Miracle plays, writing an article on them. I couldn’t make the old gentleman out at all. He spoke to me, didn’t understand the catalogues and the press marks, and I helped him to fill up his tickets for the books he wanted. He was working out some system of numbers by which you could always be sure of winning. He was very secretive about it at the time, it was afterwards he told me. We sat next to each other every day for a fortnight and then he was ill

there one day, had a sort of fit or stroke. I helped to get him out and I took him home to his lodgings in Guildford Street. The doctor I fetched to him said he'd better get away from London, go somewhere quiet and bracing, all that sort of thing, with someone to look after him. The old gentleman seemed a very helpless, lonely sort of cove and asked me if I'd go with him, said his only relation was a little daughter at school. I was at rather a loose end, just having lost a job, besides I was sorry for him; so I said 'righto' and we came along here. I don't know exactly why we came here. The fact was we neither of us had any particular views on the matter, and this is one of the places the doctor suggested. While we were here the old man (he wasn't more than sixty, but he seemed more than that, a sort of Methuselah) used to talk for hours about his precious system. He'd had one it seems, that he'd sworn by, and he'd tried it at all sorts of gaming-places abroad.

It was at some foreign Casino he'd met Mr. Trevor. He'd also got a funny system he swore by, and the two old doddering reprobates—excuse me, but your grandfather must have been a blithering ass too, you know—fell in with each other and backed their own fancies till all was blue. The Colonel went to stay at your place in Norfolk, and they gambled all night. At last poor old O'Shaughnessy realised his luck was out, so he chucked gaming for a time in order to revise and perfect his precious system. That's what he was doing in the British Museum when I picked him up. When I'd got him here I couldn't keep him from haunting the hotels and playing with anyone who'd put up stakes. His one idea was to win back more

than he'd lost. Luckily he was a most awful old bore and no one was at all keen on being bothered with him, or he'd have lost every penny I expect. The funny thing was he'd have runs of good luck sometimes that were awfully bad for him because they bucked him up and excited him, and made him worse than ever."

John Halliday looked at Gilbert to see what effect the story was having upon him, and discovered that he was both humiliated and disgusted with the revelation about his grandfather. Rather hurriedly, John struck another note.

"I must say he was never tired of singing your grandfather's praises. Mr. Trevor seems to have behaved awfully decently to him. Lots of men would have taken their three thousand pounds while they were sure of getting it. He was so grateful that he mentioned him in his will as the child's guardian."

"I can't say that I'm particularly impressed with the decency of my grandfather's behaviour: and you wrote that he never answered your letter on that subject," said Gilbert drily.

"No, he never answered the letter," admitted John, "and of course both of 'em ought to have known better than to gamble away good money. But you can hardly blame your grandfather for not troubling his head about the kid when her own father never gave her two thoughts, nor a ha'penny worth's consideration."

"Didn't he?"

"No, I'm blest if he did," said John angrily. "He thought he did, of course; he persuaded himself that all his anxiety to win money was for her. That used to make me sick with him because he obviously

played and gambled because he couldn't help it. If he'd cared tuppence about her really he'd have taken care of his money instead of chucking it away. However, after he'd been here some time and I thought his health was better, he had another stroke, and the doctor here said he couldn't last very long. I asked if he didn't want to see the child. He said he did, so I went off to fetch her. She was at a boarding-school at Highgate. She was quite pleased to come away from it, wasn't happy there; I don't think they even gave her enough to eat. They seemed quite pleased to let her go too. I fancy her father didn't pay the school fees very often. I brought her along here and he lived for about six months after that. He used to potter about with her along the front, and then one night he must have had a stroke in his sleep. He was dead when he was called in the morning."

"And what happened to the child?"

"Oh well, of course I had to look after things. After the funeral I moved round here, this was cheaper than the rooms we had in the Crescent. By that time I'd got the job of running the local paper. I met the proprietor at the Conservative Club here where I played chess with him, and the editor died so he gave it to me. It's a weekly paper, so it gave me time to look after Anne too."

"I suppose you sent her back to school, poor child?"

"No, she wouldn't go," explained her guardian serenely. "And from what I saw of the school while I was waiting for her I couldn't blame her. Anyway I wasn't sure whether there'd be any money for school or anything else until that matter of three thousand

pounds was settled. Fortunately the Colonel kept plenty of loose cash on him to play with, and he'd had a run of luck. Altogether there was sixty pounds, and some odd shillings in his purse, so Anne has been living on that until I could settle her affairs. My screw is only thirty-five bob a week, so I've had to be careful."

"Do you mean she hasn't any relations of her own?"

"The Colonel never mentioned any. All Anne knows is that she was born in India, and that her mother died when she was about ten. The lady who kept the school knew nothing except that Colonel O'Shaughnessy sent her there, and left her there while he was travelling abroad. I fancy if there had been any relations or old friends Mr. Trevor wouldn't have been the only name mentioned in what the Colonel imagined to be his will. So, of course, I've felt anxious about her future."

The odd broad young brow was puckered into a frown of perplexity.

"So far it has been all plain sailing. She's a thoroughly simple, straightforward, nice kid, not spoilt and no nonsense about her, and we've managed. I've gone on with her education as best I could. I'm teaching her Latin and Greek on a plan of my own. I don't know whether it is a great success, p'raps it's not a sound plan, and p'raps I'm not a good teacher. Sometimes when she makes worse howlers than usual I get disheartened. And there is an old French character we picked up on the harbour, who's taken rather a fancy to her; he's teaching her French. She's gone to him for a lesson this afternoon. She likes old Monsieur Bourget, and seems to be getting

on all right with French. Mrs. Mugford, our landlady, the party who let you in, she looks after her too, washes her hair for her and that sort of thing. Between us we've done our best, but nobody knows better than I do that it isn't an ideal arrangement for a girl of her age."

"Now that the matter of the child's three thousand pounds is finally settled I suppose she can be sent to school?"

"I'll talk to her about it. It is uncommonly decent of you."

Gilbert quickly and impatiently deprecated any expressions of gratitude.

"My grandfather may have robbed her father but I don't intend to rob the child. If I inherit my grandfather's estate I inherit his responsibilities, and this child seems to have been one of his responsibilities."

"Not legally: you'll find the will isn't worth the paper it is written on."

"I'd rather like to see it. At any rate I seem to be the nearest equivalent to a legal trustee that she has, and I'm perfectly willing to act, if you agree. My sister will help us find a school."

"Hadn't you better wait till you've seen her?" suggested John Halliday.

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Oh, I don't know. Nothing in theory, everything in practice. Honestly, my mind is divided. I want what's best for Anne. If you've got a sister you're in a better position than I am, because I've no women-folk to turn to. . . . Only I've got fond of her. I understand her, and you might take a dislike to her and she wouldn't be happy."

The conversation was interrupted by the arrival

of Mrs. Mugford who had added a crocheted white cap to her attire. She brought in further instalments of a meal, a blue jug, a white sugar basin, and a green plush tea-cosy embellished with yellow ribbons.

"She's due in to tea now anyway," said John Halliday, seizing his chance of gaining time. "I'll get that will if you'd like to look at it. Where's Miss Anne, Mrs. Mugford?"

"She's away oot and has been since her dinner. She may be away havin' her lesson in French like the good little lassie she is, or she may be muckin' about they boats in the harbour like I've said I wouldn't have her doing; only I might as well speak to the waves on the shore."

Without waiting to hear this synopsis of the uncertainty of his charge's occupations John Halliday went upstairs to fetch the will. Mrs. Mugford placed the tea-cosy where it could not fail to catch the stranger's eyes broadside on and display its utmost glories, and returned downstairs to fetch the teapot.

Gilbert went to the bow-window and looked up and down the curve of the street. The inhabitants of Lennox Terrace were all indoors having tea. There was nobody in sight but a baker delivering bread at the door of a house on the opposite side of the road, and a schoolgirl coming slowly down the hill. As she passed the baker's handcart her demure behaviour changed. She gave an alert glance round her like a bird before pecking at a worm, seized two loaves out of the open basket on the pavement, and darted off down the hill with one under each arm. The baker saw her and started in pursuit. She had about twenty yards' start and she ran like a young hare. Her fair hair streamed in the wind behind her, and

her long, straight, thin black legs carried her down the hill with a swift ease and grace that made Gilbert hope she would escape with her ill-gotten bread. He hoped it æsthetically; because she ran so well and the baker ran heavily and clumsily; morally because her action had dramatically suggested a tragedy of poverty and want, with a little, shabby, pathetic heroine; mentally because he did not want to see the baker catch her. The natural *dénouement* of that end to the drama would be that the child would be frightened and pitiful, the baker rough and revengeful, and he, Gilbert, was just too far from the scene to interfere in time on the culprit's behalf, though he was prepared to rush out of the house if she needed physical protection from the wrathful baker, who was undoubtedly gaining on her; for all his clumsiness his legs were longer. As the distance between pursuer and pursued lessened and the maiden seemed in imminent danger of being caught up, she stopped and threw both loaves over the railings into one of the little gardens. Then she darted, or danced, across the road. The baker, instead of darting after her, paused, went into the garden and recovered his loaves and his breath, merely shaking his fist at the culprit who calmly turned up the hill again, stopping on her way to pull up one of her stockings and adjust the ribbon on her hair.

"I'll tell yer father of you one of these days," shouted the baker, "you see if I don't!"

Gilbert heard through the silence of the afternoon.

"You can't," was the unperturbed reply, shouted back triumphantly by a damsel less distressed than Gilbert had imagined anyone could possibly be. "You can't! He's dead!"

"I'm hanged if I don't believe that's my blessed orphan!" exclaimed Gilbert to himself.

And, blessed or unblessed, it was. Because she pushed open the gate and ran up the steps.

CHAPTER II

FIVE minutes afterwards, Anne, having presumably followed the strenuously whispered advice to wash her hands and brush her hair that had greeted her arrival, was formally introduced by John Halliday.

Gilbert in a quick critical glance decided that she was not pretty. Her long thick hair was so fair that it lacked colour ; her lips were refined and sensitive but her mouth was one size too large for her very small pale face : then she looked up with the largest, bluest eyes he had ever seen. They were also much too large for her eager little face, they were deep-set, very wide apart, and they opened very wide indeed. They were like two blue lamps, Gilbert decided. When she smiled her lips parted and disclosed pretty white teeth. Her paleness, her fairness, and her extreme slenderness gave her the appearance of great delicacy, and she looked much younger than her years in a plain, shabby, black serge dress with a string of green beads round her neck. All arms and legs and eyes, he mentally summed her up.

"I watched you coming down the street," he said. He hadn't meant to refer to her escapade with the baker, but the words slipped out and he regretted them until he saw that they evoked neither embarrassment nor self-consciousness.

"Did you ?" she said. "I didn't see you."

"I was at the window, wondering whether I should have to rush out and rescue you."

"I like teasing that man, he's so stupid. I do it every afternoon," explained Anne with a dignity that Gilbert felt to be as illogical as it was baffling.

"Do you like sugar in your tea?"

"What man is this?" enquired John.

"Only the baker," said Anne. "Not our baker."

Then, that subject disposed of, she passed each man his cup of tea.

Having done her duty as a hostess she relapsed into silence. She was either shy or hungry or both; neither John nor Gilbert could get out of her more than "yes" or "no" as she steadily ate bread and butter with brown sugar on it, while John Halliday entertained his guest with the editorial adventures of the *St. Hilda's Bay Gazette*.

It seemed that the proprietor was a Conservative and the principal advertisers Radicals, which made the editor's task of writing all the leading articles a matter that demanded political tact rather than political insight.

"There's no pleasing them all," explained John Halliday, "so the only safe thing is to rile them all. Then when old Jordan (he's the proprietor) comes down to the office in a rage, wanting to sack me for saying the Home Secretary hasn't the guts of a guinea-pig, I can show him a furious letter from Job Wellings, the big draper, threatening to withdraw his full-page advertisement because the same article says the Radical opposition is spoon-fed on cocoa which gets into their heads. I'm in a fairly strong position really, because since I took on the

rag its circulation has increased. It is the finest toy in the world, you know—a newspaper. I've taught Anne to correct proofs, and she helps me no end. We've taken to putting in poetry—original verses if I can get any that aren't too putridly rotten, otherwise anything that Anne likes out of my books as long as it is short: and reviews of books too. I let Anne try her hand at criticism; gave her two books to read, and told her to write her opinion of them. However, she wrote of one, 'This seems to be a very silly book,' and of the other, 'so does this.' So, as the *Gazette* is not *The Times Literary Supplement*, I've had to take her off reviewing and give her scissors and paste instead."

"Any libel actions?"

"No. I studied the libel law and discovered how to say what I like in perfect safety. Also, if you keep off local folk and stick to abusing the big guns in London, you can count upon being immune. But as I was saying to the boss yesterday, if only one could get a Cabinet Minister to bring a libel action against us the fortunes of the *Gazette* would be made. Why it would circulate all over Yorkshire after an advertisement like that!" said the editor wistfully.

After tea Gilbert returned to his hotel to write to his sister:

"MY DEAR FRANCESCA,

The news I have for you is rather a surprise to me. Crane Hall will, I fear, prove an unremunerative responsibility unless it lets, as no doubt it will do, as there is good shooting with it. Our grandfather seems to have been even a less

desirable relation than we considered him before. It was a disappointment to find the Estate in a bad way financially. I had hoped it would enable me to repay part of your generosity with something more tangible than gratitude. And as far as I have been able to go into the figures, I stand to get remarkably little out of the place. But I have inherited another responsibility of our grandfather's, and I am relying upon your mercy and counting upon your help and moral support. A certain Colonel O'Shaughnessy, whom my grandfather appears to have treated pretty badly (gambled with him and robbed him of considerable sums of money), made a will making grandfather his daughter's guardian. The child, a girl of fifteen, is stranded here with nobody in the world to look after her but a pleasant young man of about twenty-three years old, an impecunious journalist with Bohemian tastes and ways. I feel morally, though not legally, bound to accept the charge which devolves on me. I say 'not legally' because the will which I have just read through is not witnessed and would not stand in the English courts, though according to Scots law it would hold good. Therefore, I am going to suggest to the child's present guardian that we take the will as a valid document, and that we put the money, about three thousand pounds, into trust, with him and myself as the child's legal trustees, her guardians until she is of age, and the trustees of her property afterwards. Then I shall appeal to you to come to the rescue and find a school for my protégée. At present I feel like a hen who is suddenly required to take charge of a young sea-

gull. She is at present in fifth-rate lodgings, with this young John Halliday, chaperoned by a Dickens' caricature of a landlady.

Your affectionate brother,

GILBERT."

That evening he had another interview with John Halliday and laid the idea before him.

"Of course," Gilbert concluded, "if you have a better plan in your own mind I don't want to interfere."

"I haven't," said John, "I haven't any plans. I have been infernally puzzled to know what to do for the best. It is such a nuisance Anne being a girl and at such an awkward age. If she'd been ten years younger I could have adopted her, or ten years older she'd have been married probably. As it is she's a problem. I don't know what to do with her at all. She has no real literary gifts that I can discover, or if she has they're undeveloped, and it's all I've got to give her—a training in how not to write English."

"Shall we consult Anne before we settle her affairs and tie up her money?"

"No," said John decidedly, "we won't. It wouldn't be fair for one thing, kids of fifteen don't know what's good for them. Another thing is that if we put it into her head that it is undecided, and something for her to have views about, she'll probably out with very clear ones that would be all wrong. While if we face her with a cut-and-dried plan all settled and done with, and not to be argued about, she'll be most likely to accept it like a Briton and be as good as gold."

The two young men were walking up and down the cliff after dinner at the White Hart. Anne, who had dined with them in a clean white muslin frock which she had outgrown, and in which she looked very cold, had been taken home to bed at half-past nine. John had been most anxious for his charge to make a good impression at dinner. Anne's idea of good behaviour was apparently to keep silent. Gilbert had tried to draw her out by asking :

"Did your father ever talk to you about my grandfather ?"

"Yes," replied Anne, "lots of times, but I didn't listen much."

"You didn't listen ?" Her candid undutifulness seemed to require explanation.

"No. It was all about playing cards, and I didn't believe it, so it didn't interest me."

Gilbert glanced quickly at John, but he was watching Anne.

"What didn't you believe ?"

"What Daddy told me," said Anne calmly, between spoonfuls of caramel pudding. "Daddy said you could find a way of playing in which you couldn't lose, so that you could go on and win as much money as you liked. It couldn't be true you know, or everyone would do it. Or if it were true for somebody it would be no use, because nobody would be silly enough to play with anybody if they knew he'd got a dodge by which he couldn't lose."

"They mightn't know ; he might leave them to find out."

"Then that would be cheating," said Anne severely, "and wouldn't be fair."

She finished her pudding, and remarked :

"Poor Daddy was very ill, and when people are ill they very often get fancies, the doctor said. Daddy fancied that he'd won a lot of money, but he hadn't, of course, because he hadn't got it. So I usen't to take any notice and didn't listen much."

If Anne's attitude were unfilial her tone was kindly and tolerant : too detached to be accurately described as maternal, it nevertheless approached motherliness; perhaps avuncular was near the mark : she might have been a broad-minded aunt discussing a scapegrace nephew.

The next day Gilbert received a telegram from his sister :

"Bring your sea-gull to me as soon as possible.

FRANCESCA."

Gilbert left John Halliday to unfold the situation to Anne and to explain to her the disposition of her future and her property. The objection Anne raised was one they had not foreseen ; it concerned the paper, the *St. Hilda's Bay Gazette* : she wished to know who would help the editor with that publication if she were removed by her trustees, and implied that a satisfactory answer to her question would be unwelcome.

"The kid thinks she's invaluable," said John ruefully, "and I hadn't the heart to undeceive her. I like her spirit—if she were offered the editorship of *The Times* to-morrow she'd take it. I told her that there was no future in our branch of journalism, that I should get someone else to help me, and that pretty soon I should go back to London, which is quite true.

I told her that journalism is a dog's life for a girl, and that my real job is writing plays. She's promised to act in them! Says if she can't be an editor she thinks she'll be an actress. It seems to me we're going to have our work cut out as Anne's trustees, heading her off awful ideas." He lit the cigarette Gilbert offered him, and said: "I shall miss her like hell."

Gilbert was anxious to get away from Yorkshire. He intended to place Anne with Francesca and leave the choice of a school to her. It was arranged that he should start as soon as possible, leave the deed to be drawn up by the solicitors in York whom John had already consulted, and take Anne straight on to Mrs. Waring in Gloucestershire. It was difficult to tell whether Anne was reconciled to her fate or not; she was very docile, made no difficulties, and took a keenly intelligent interest in everything that was explained to her.

"There is no nonsense about Anne," Gilbert was assured when he asked whether she would be unhappy at being cast among strangers. And when a young man says of a feminine specimen of the human race that there is no nonsense about her he means that she is devoid of emotions, and that, from the young British male with his abhorrence for tears and scenes, is praise. Gilbert accepted it as high praise.

However, when everything was settled, Anne disconcerted John Halliday by reopening the subject and beginning again from the starting-post.

"I've been thinking," said Anne the evening before she was to leave St. Hilda's Bay, "and I'd rather stay here with you."

"And I'd rather have you, old lady, only it can't be done. There's your father's will to be considered, and all that sort of thing."

"But I don't know that I shall like where I'm going to." Her voice was firm, but there was a quiver on her lip that wrenched John's heart.

"If you don't like it, you send a wire to me and I'll fetch you away in a jiffy."

"And bring me back here ? "

"I'm not sure of being here myself," he hedged ; "besides there's no blinking facts, you've jolly well got to go to school and be educated."

Anne considered and then said slowly, with a sigh :

"Very well ; but the moment I'm educated I shall come back to you."

"Righto," said John, "and whether I'm editing *The Times* or the *Athenæum* you'll be much more use as a sub-editor if you know a thing or two."

Anne's alacrity in accepting his promise to write to her as an adequate compensation for whatever distance of time and space it was proposed to place between them, was regarded by both young men as a proof of her possession of a creditable, philosophic spirit, whereas it was but a symptom of her youth and inexperience : for it seemed that Anne had never received a letter in her life. Colonel O'Shaughnessy, when compelled to communicate with or about his daughter, had resorted to telegrams.

Old Monsieur Bourget also promised to write to Anne ; but Anne, though politely grateful, seemed to reserve an opinion whether a French letter came into the category of letters unalloyed. This was at the station where Monsieur Bourget came to see

them off. He treated Anne with as much deference as if she were middle-aged and a duchess: John treated her as if she were ten years old and a little boy. He just patted her on the shoulder and pushed her into the train.

John Halliday went on to the editorial office of his *Gazette* with a very heavy heart. He cut and pasted extracts from the London papers quite abstractedly; and when Mr. Jordan, the proprietor of the *Gazette*, came in to mention that a local celebrity, whom he had just met on the quay, had complained bitterly that a letter he had deigned to write to the editor, the editor had not deigned to insert, the editor's lack of interest startled the proprietor into genial sarcasm.

"What's up? Are you thinking out one of your schemes for getting me in the bankruptcy court and yourself in the dock with a really high-class libel action, eh?"

John shook his head.

"I was telling you that old man Bolling is in a fine taking because you don't print his letters."

"If I put in all the letters every lugubrious old buster in the Bay chose to write about the Urban District Council who do you think would read the *Gazette*? An editor's job is to know what to leave out of a paper."

"Well, when you've got me broke without even the fun of a libel action, don't blame me because you've lost your job—offending all the oldest subscribers this way."

"A subscriber's job is to read the paper not to write it. But if you know of another man to take my place, I wish you'd send him along and I'll show him the local ropes."

"Don't be a sillier ass than you can help. I'm not finding fault with the way you do your work. It is the proprietor's job to turn up at the office, and have a chat to see how big the editor's head may be getting."

"I know—you're awfully decent to me, and I'm very grateful," said John; "but all the same, I'm thinking of resigning and going to London, and I'm speaking about it at once to give you plenty of time to find another man."

Mr. Jordan sat down heavily on the nearest chair and laid his hat and stick on the desk with a thump.

"Man be damned, you young rascal! Aren't I telling you I don't want a man? I'm quite content with the silly owl of a boy that I've got in your own shoes."

John flushed with pleasure.

"Thanks awfully, sir. But all the same, I do want to go back to London."

Josiah Jordan frowned, and growled some imprecation into his own short beard. Then he held up a gnarled rheumatic forefinger and delivered an oration on the folly of young men in general, and the peculiar imbecility of the young man who gives up a certain bird in the hand for an uncertain bird in a probably unpleasantly prickly bush.

"I've no patience with this craze of going to London. Anyone would think that all the brains and sense of the kingdom were wanted there, which they are not; there's plenty there, such as it is, and it's brains and sense as are wanted in the counties. That's what's the matter with the world—everyone flying into the cities, treading on each other's toes

and elbowing each other's breath out of their lungs. It don't make for pleasantness nor manners nor results. What would you think of a farmer as put all his manure in one corner of his field? You'd say he'd get a damned poor harvest. Besides you're not the sort to make your way in a crowd. You stay here and work up your own job in your own way. It will be good for you and good for the district. I'll keep you out of mischief here and back you up. Who's going to do that for you in London?"

"I don't know," said John, "I dare say you're right. But I feel I've got to go. There are private reasons . . ."

The old man looked at him shrewdly.

"Not more than one, I trust? You take an old man's advice and have only one private reason at a time; and remember that you can't tell if she's the right sort by looking at her."

John returned to Lennox Terrace to write a leading article for his *Gazette* on fish manure, a subject upon which his knowledge was of a slightness that called for care and ingenuity in the choice and use of five hundred words. When Mrs. Mugford brought him his tea she found him staring dismally at a blank sheet of paper. She laid out the tray with sympathetic care not to make a noise—the care that in avoiding one healthy, outspoken noise that nobody minds produces half a dozen apologetic, exasperating minor noises that only the most equable nerves can stand with cheerfulness.

"For Heaven's sake bring another cup and sit down and pour the stuff out for me," said John gloomily.

Mrs. Mugford's depression became tinged with

satisfaction: she became conspicuously more depressed by way of politeness. She sat down nervously at the very edge of a chair, not because it lacked a castor but because she possessed a firm code of good manners, and was disconcerted when her host and lodger suggested she should remove herself to a safer seat.

"You'll be missing Miss Anne," she said, introducing the bill before the house with no unnecessary preamble.

"What's worrying me," said John, absent-mindedly punching holes in a thick slice of bread and butter with the end of his penholder, "is whether I've done the right thing in letting these people take her? What do I know about them? I've made what enquiries I can and they seem to be all right, but will they look after her properly?"

"You've done the best as you could, sir," said Mrs. Mugford consolingly.

"But she's only a kid—if she isn't happy or anything. . . . After all while she was here I did know she was all right as far as things went. Upon my word I wish I'd insisted upon keeping her here under my own eye, and looking after her myself."

"You was goodness itself, sir, and wherever Miss Anne goes she'll not meet a kinder young gentleman. I've often thought to myself as the Almighty missed making a good mother when He made you a gentleman instead of a lady. But if you will forgive the freedom, if Miss Anne's own mother had been alive to-day she'd say that what young ladies of her age want to look after them is another lady, and no amount of young gentlemen can come to quite the same thing, sir, no amount whatever." She wound up firmly as

if she suspected John of harbouring a theory that the multiplication of unsuitable guardians might, in time, equal the efficacy of one of the right species.

"I suppose there's something in that," conceded John reluctantly, "but she is not a baby. I'm sure you and I together managed her beautifully."

"I'm sure I did my best, sir." Mrs. Mugford's pale brown face became faintly pink with gratification. "But what with the house, and the stairs, and the shopping, and prices what they are, and the rates always on my mind, I couldn't do all as I'd have liked to, nor what a young lady like Miss Anne had a call to have done. Now if I'd 'a had time of a afternoon to put on my bonnet and black gloves and take Miss Anne out for a nice walk along the Crescent, that would have been all very nice and proper. But with me never having me apron off as it were, there was Miss Anne the Lord knows where with the Lord knows who, down on the harbour as like as not, with them riff-raff boys, though time after time I've said as no little lady as was a little lady would do so. 'You go to blazes, Mrs. Mugford,' she'd say quite pleasant like, 'I shall do what I damn well like.'"

John looked rather startled.

"Oh, she could be a naughty little gell, bless her," said Mrs. Mugford placidly, with affection on every line of her countenance, "a very naughty little gell."

"Bless me, I hope she won't use that language to Mrs. Waring! They'll never understand it."

"All the better for Miss Anne if understand it they don't." Mrs. Mugford sipped her tea with a sceptical expression in her eyes that betrayed her conviction

that Miss Anne's chances of not having such language understood were both few and slender.

"I mean if she talks like that they'll never understand what a dear, good little kid she really is," explained her worried trustee and guardian.

"She can be as good a little maid as ever stepped when she likes, and it's my belief as she will like."

"If they bully her and make her unhappy I'll just have her back that's all." He laid down his cup and pushed away his plate. "I shall go back to London, you know, to be nearer her in case."

Mrs. Mugford clasped her hands with a nervous, troubled gesture.

"And give up your rooms, sir?"

"I'm afraid so. I shall be sorry . . ."

The perfunctory kind words died on his lips as he saw the woman's tragic face.

"And sorry ain't the word for me, sir. Of course, go you must if you say so."

"I won't go till you've let my rooms," promised John hastily, realising that his small rent and board made up a considerable proportion of Mrs. Mugford's inadequate income.

"That's your kind heart and your innocence makes you promise that, sir, and I couldn't hold you to no such rashness. Why maybe it would be months before I found a regular gentleman like yourself to abide here in the winter, and no trouble and a kind heart. That's the way of life, sir, if you've lodgings to let. Them as you'd have stay has to go away and leave you empty, and them as wants to come, like as not you'd prefer the emptiness if you hadn't got to live by them."

It was characteristic of John Halliday that he added his landlady's trouble to his own burden of uneasiness, and worried more over the possibility of her finding another lodger to take his place than over the chances of finding work in London himself.

CHAPTER III

GILBERT did his best to amuse Anne on their journey, but when she refused the food he offered her he could think of no other diversion. She explained that she didn't like dinners on trains, and he ascertained that she was under the impression that the meals were cooked by the engine-driver in the locomotive's boilers. She said John Halliday had told her so, and when Gilbert, in order to reassure her, took her down the train to inspect the kitchen, the heat and flavoured steam of that department didn't reassure her at all. She said it made her feel sick. During the rest of the journey she curled up in the corner of the carriage and stared out of the window in silence, looking very small and white and miserable.

Gilbert was relieved when they arrived at Whitmead junction, their journey's end. He was beginning to feel a certain personal and possessive sense of responsibility about Anne, and he wished her to make a good impression upon Francesca; he was aware that his charge was not looking her best. After the journey she was not only pale but dirty; the black lines under her great blue eyes were fatigue, but there was a dusty impression of black smuts about her too. He would like to have had her face washed and her hair brushed before presenting her to his sister, but as there was nobody at the little

station but the stationmaster and his son, who was both porter and ticket-collector, it was an impracticable aspiration.

The drive from the station was up and down a hilly road that wound between fields yellow-starred with dandelions, and under trees green with every shade of green, green that varied as greatly as the shape of the young leaves—golden green, silvery green, emerald green, grey-green, bronze-green, and the clear, bright, pure green that beech leaves are for those magical few days in April when they are just out of their brown sheathes, thin and crumpled with the light shining through them, when they are more deliciously green than anything the sun shines on, even when it is shining on an English spring with the grass growing straight in the fields and hedgerows.

They drove through a tiny village of grey stone, brown-roofed cottages. Each little garden was gay with daffodils and wallflowers and early tulips, pink and white, yellow and red. The walls and roofs were embossed with patches of soft green and brown mosses, delicate white fruit blossom clouded the plum and cherry trees, and the pear trees were covered with knots of pale grey down that would soon be in flower. Beyond the village Gilbert pulled up the horse to avoid an excited hen in the road with a brood of irresponsible little yellow chicks, and turned in at a white gate between lilac bushes and a laburnum tree.

Anne saw a two-storied, gabled, old stone house covered with wistaria. A tall woman with smooth red hair was waiting for them on the doorstep, a thin woman of about thirty-five, dressed in a well-cut tweed coat and skirt.

Francesca Waring saw a pale, shabbily dressed, tired little girl. She patted her shoulder, then shook hands with Gilbert, remarked that their train was punctual, and in fact behaved as Gilbert invariably trusted her to behave, with absolute serenity, and as if her only male relative were in the habit of bringing home strange orphans for adoption once a week. Francesca, in all Gilbert's experience of her, never showed excitement or emotion or any disturbing quality, only a kindly common sense.

Tea was ready in the drawing-room, a long low room with windows leading out into the garden. Francesca had prepared a tea to welcome her fifteen-year-old guest. There were jam sandwiches, hot scones, chocolate cake, and gingerbread on a round oak tea-table between the wood fire and the open window. She put Anne on the sofa beside her, and made her eat while she talked to Gilbert about their journey, the garden, and the village affairs. Anne was tired and a little bewildered. The white bedroom which had been prepared for her, and where she had just washed her very grubby face and hands, was the most luxurious place she had ever had allotted to her. The difference between the domesticities of Mrs. Mugford's régime at Lennox Terrace and this clean house with its white-panelled walls, its shining brass and gay chintzes, its silver and its flowers was startling. The tea-table with its glistening silver, the china with its cheerful, grinning green dragons, the array of cakes, contrasted with the heavy, chipped, ill-assorted tea-things set out by Mrs. Mugford and even at her school, seemed to belong to another world : a very pleasant world inhabited by well-dressed people like Gilbert and Francesca, a world where

chairs and sofas lacked not castors, and were clothed with flowered chintzes, where there was abundance of hot water in shining brass cans, a world that was fragrant with the scent of flowers. There were flowers all over the drawing-room, a blue bowl of primroses on the tea-table; tall glasses filled with tulips; while through the open window blew a sweet warm breath of young lilac, wallflowers, the ineffable smell of a garden in spring, distilled of showers and freshly turned earth, of sunshine, young leaves and buds, of honey in the opening flowers.

Francesca, while chatting to Gilbert, watched Anne's face as well as her teacup and plate; she noticed her quick, appreciative, shy glances round the room, noted with amusement how the blue eyes found and dwelt on her most cherished treasures, the Medici coloured prints, the collection of blue china over the mantelpiece, the piece of Chinese embroidery on the piano; these things absorbed her attention all the time she was eating cake. Then from the flowers she looked out into the garden; the beds under the windows were ablaze with yellow and brown and red wallflowers. The long border by the lawn, the pride of Francesca's heart, was pierced by hundreds of tender green spears, the pioneers of the marvellous glories to come, but there were groups of pink tulips, stalwart orange lilies, and blue clouds of forget-me-not, dusty brown aurículas, and glowing masses of crimson and purple anemones, and the sunshine caught the purple tips of the growing rose trees. At the end of the garden an old laburnum was in full bloom, and beyond it a vista of green open country stretched into a sapphire blue distance. The eager, wistful expression on Anne's face as she

sat and looked into the garden touched Francesca, but Gilbert was saying something about schools and Francesca's knowledge of such institutions.

"There's plenty of time to think of that," Francesca said. "I'm here for the garden at the moment. If it won't bore Anne, I should like to keep her here for a little until we know each other. You're not in all that hurry to go to school, are you?" she said to her guest, who flushed and shook her head, too shy to utter the relief that was overwhelming her.

"That's all right then, because all well-regulated schools are having their Easter holidays, so we shall have time to make friends; and I shall be very glad to have you, my dear. In the meantime I'm going to take a hostess's privilege and kiss you."

She laid a hand on the child's shoulder and drew her nearer. Anne put up her lips like an obedient baby, and, to Gilbert's surprise and discomfort, when Francesca had kissed her she burst into tears.

He obeyed with alacrity Francesca's peremptory orders to go away, orders she conveyed with one significant glance at the door. Afterwards, when Anne was in bed, he thought it necessary, or at least advisable, for him to apologise for his charge's behaviour. He and Francesca were smoking cigarettes in the garden, by the golden light of a full moon that lit up the white and pale yellow flowers like a lantern shining on polished gold and silver, and left the other little coloured heads asleep in the mysterious dimness that was neither darkness nor light.

"Funny, you know," he began rather awkwardly, "Anne crying like that at tea. I've never known her do that before."

"You've known her about a fortnight, haven't you?" enquired Francesca drily—so drily that he thought the apology needed amplifying. After all, he had imposed this whim of his upon Francesca with a written guarantee that there was "no nonsense about her," and before the child had been in the house an hour she had infringed the first elementary rule of the game he had implied she could invariably play.

"But I've seen a good deal of her," he explained; "and I assure you it was very unlike her. I dare say she was tired; she didn't eat any lunch."

Francesca threw away her cigarette and thrust her hands into the pockets of the long coat she was wearing over her black dinner-dress as she faced him among her beds of wallflowers.

"My dear Gilbert," she expostulated, "if you've adopted Anne under the delusion that female children of fifteen are made of indiarubber and steel springs, I'm sorry for you, and I should be still sorrier for Anne if I intended to allow her to be left to your mercies, which I don't. You dig up a very highly-strung, shy, nervous child by the roots, take her away from the only friends she's got, travel all day without seeing she has anything to eat, and plant her among strangers without giving her any assurance that she won't be starved or ill-used. When she discovered that life included not only tea and cake but a little petting, the poor baby's relief was too much for her tightly screwed-up nerves; and why you think it necessary to apologise for her I cannot imagine."

"You talk as if I had been brutal to her, which is as ridiculous as to tell me that she is nervous; she's

the coolest, calmest hand for her age that I've ever come across."

"That proves she has brains as well as nerves," said Francesca serenely ; "the two possessions aren't mutually exclusive you know."

It was borne in upon Gilbert's mind that between Francesca and Anne there had been established some subtle bond in which he had no part. It did not exclude him ; it simply passed over his head.

CHAPTER IV

It was John Halliday's fault that Anne was expelled from the first school at which Francesca placed her. It was a modern school and an admirable institution on its own lines. The girls, a hundred of them, wore a sensible, if shapeless, uniform of dull green serge ; they had good food, plenty of fresh air and exercise, and were given a great deal of correlated information on a rational system that made it easy for them to retain and digest as much of the knowledge that was imparted to them as happened to interest them, and no academical system yet devised can honestly claim to do more. The girls were also allowed a generous amount of liberty in the safe seclusion of the Sussex hills. But no head-mistress of a popular girls' school can run the risk of enduring twice what Miss Hunter unexpectedly suffered once.

John Halliday, arrived in London and finding his level in Fleet Street, took the first opportunity of going out to Hillfield to see Anne. Holding the unassailable position of being Anne's guardian, and happening to have gone on a whole holiday, he carried her off for the day. He would have preferred to spend the time on the Sussex Downs, but Anne, when the alternative of a walk to a neighbouring village and a *matinée* in London were suggested to her, inevitably chose the *matinée*. He took her up

by the next train. They had lunch in a little French restaurant in Soho, a dingy, garish, joyous little restaurant, where the food was cheap and strange, and the company was cheerful and noisy, as cheap and strange as the food, and as garish as the decorations. Anne, in her demure sage green uniform and her sailor hat with the school ribbon round it, looked conspicuously out of place, and John discerned this before the room was full ; but Anne enjoyed the novelty and the excitement after weeks of school life, and he had not the hardness of heart to hurry her through the meal ; nor had he the gift of hurrying waiters. After lunch he took her to a *matinée*. It was *Hamlet*, and they both enjoyed it—Anne the rare experience of being in a theatre at all, and John the joy and the pleasing illusion of renewing his share in Anne's education. Afterwards they had tea at a confectioner's in the Strand where he plied her with chocolate *éclairs* and enthusiastic criticism.

“ There's a poet for you ! He's like some wonderful great building, you see he's fine, but you don't find out how big he is till you study the detail, and then it comes to you gradually. Some of these new little newspaper fellows use the word *theatrical* as if it meant something vulgar and cheap : but that's all wrong, Anne, you know. Shakespeare is really the most *theatrical* dramatist that ever was, and it's pure poetry. Ophelia is mad, and he gives her flowers to play with—*rosemary, pansies, wild flowers, lovely gentle things like her thoughts ;* she is just a little girl. In *King Lear* the old man is mad and he crowns him with ‘*rank fumiter, burdocks, nettles, hemlock, darnel,*’ evil weeds—all pure symbolism—

theatrical symbolism, and the simplest, most glorious poetry."

Anne listened in her silent way, her large intelligent eyes alight with thought and eagerness. Then she said reflectively, carefully biting a large chocolate éclair :

"I wonder why he made Hamlet such a cad?"

"Hamlet! A cad! Great Scott, my dear child! if that is what they teach you at Hillfield I'm blown if I don't insist upon you being removed!"

"They're not teaching me *Hamlet* at all; we're doing *Julius Cæsar*. I think he was a cad, from what I've seen of him this afternoon. He was a cad to treat Ophelia like that."

"Was he?" said John blankly. He looked at Anne in a puzzled way as she calmly ate éclairs and gave him new and enlightening points of view. "It hadn't occurred to me."

"She hadn't done anything, and he was simply horrid to her."

They solemnly discussed Shakespeare for about three-quarters of an hour longer, and then John looked up at the clock. It was half-past six.

"Lord!" said John, "we've missed your train!"

The next, and last, and very slow train to Hillfield left at nine-forty, at which hour Anne should have been in bed.

"I shan't be back till eleven o'clock," said Anne. "What fun!"

"As there is nothing else to be done, we may as well make the most of it."

He was rather puzzled to know what to do with her. He didn't like to take her to dine at any of the little cheap restaurants in Soho that he knew, nor

could they go to any of the big hotels, he had neither the money nor the presence of mind. He thought of taking her to the Exhibition at Earl's Court, but did not wish to risk missing the last train, and thought it might be difficult to get Anne away again. Then he remembered the careless advice of a chance acquaintance he had made in the waiting-room of the *Daily Chronicle* office, an untidy young critic with whom he had had a friendly but violent argument, who had said at parting, "Come to the Café de la Lune one evening and we'll have a quiet chat on the subject." A café where a quiet chat was possible must be a quiet one he imagined. So he took Anne to dine at the Café de la Lune in Leicester Square.

They were very early, and found it as quiet as John desired. He was anxious to find out whether Anne was really happy in her new home. He was pleased to find that she was, and that she evidently had found in Mrs. Waring a kind, wise friend. This was a great relief to his personal affection and sense of responsibility; but at the same time there was an unsatisfied, chivalrous, romantic instinct lurking at the back of his consciousness that would have been better pleased if Anne had wept and implored him to take her away and take charge of her himself. He didn't want Anne to be unhappy, but he did want to befriend and comfort and protect her. He recognised that it was an idiotic, illogical instinct to be sternly suppressed. What on earth could he do with her? Why he didn't even see his way to stop her eating the strange and probably indigestible salad that a foreign, and therefore senseless, waiter had handed to her. But the suppressed instinct, imprisoned and fettered, looked out of his eyes rather wistfully, and

Anne saw it and felt a little disloyal because she didn't want to go back to the happy but grubby, untidy, shabby world that was John's. He had been very kind to her, and she loved him; but Francesca was also kind to her, and petted her in a woman's way denied to John. Anne was contented at school, but Francesca's home was the house she was happy in. The cleanliness and order and simple comfort of a well-managed house was luxury to Anne, who had never known one before. A house where everything was magically clean without the ugly machinery of cleanliness, pails full of dirty water and worn scrubbing brushes and torn dish-cloths, being in evidence; with meals, well-cooked and served without apparent effort or clatter or accidents, was as wonderful to Anne as a crystal palace in a fairy tale. She felt very much as a sun-loving plant might be supposed to feel suddenly transplanted from a dark damp corner into open sunshine. And she felt it was ungrateful to John, so she tried to atone for it by dwelling on the rapidity with which she was acquiring information at school, information that was to be so valuable an asset in their future enterprise of editing and sub-editing whatever publication should need their joint services when she had finished her education. It was understood that by that time, say in two years, he would have found some such paper, if not *The Times* or the *Athenæum*, some equally respectable rival; "a quarterly one would do," said Anne, partly to show that she knew of the existence of such unexciting products of journalism, partly to prove that she was not exacting in her demands on Providence.

And John was young enough and lonely enough to play with the idea as seriously as such charming toys

are meant to be played with, and to feel no inclination to laugh nor to disillusion her, only an instinct to keep her guileless faith in him and in the future as a very precious possession. He was finding the world he was trying to live in a difficult place to dream in with tranquillity.

In this hour with Anne he forgot his troubles and struggles and disillusionments. With a solemnity to match her innocence he discussed their future careers as if they were two partners in a business that was a practical concern with capital, and premises, and advertisements, and every accessory of a well-financed undertaking, assured and in being, quite ignorant of the fact that he had brought Anne to an inappropriate place in which to pass an idyllically innocent evening. He was quite pleased with himself for recollecting that they had to catch the nine-thirty train, and moreover for catching it.

Unfortunately Miss Ogilvy-Hunter was a Londoner with brothers, and she knew enough about the Café de la Lune to object to her pupils dining there in school uniform. In a long letter to Francesca she explained that she might have overlooked the infringement of all the laws of her establishment that were broken by Anne's arrival back at eleven-thirty p.m. chaperoned by an insufficiently apologetic young man, if the adventure had only included *Hamlet* and tea at a Strand tea-shop ; but dinner at the Café de la Lune. . . . The gist of the letter was that she preferred the charge of girls who were not handicapped by the possession of guardians who considered such places suitable resorts in which to overstay leave on half-term holidays.

Francesca laughed, and frowned, and transferred

Anne to a school in Norfolk, where there was a train service of such inconvenience that it was not possible to get there and back in one day from London.

She was grateful to Anne for bringing a new and absorbing interest into her life. Since the death of her husband she had had two great interests apart from Gilbert—her garden and social reform. Her bookshelves were crowded with volumes on political economy and horticulture. She read with zest every book and paper that she could buy or borrow. In her desire to remedy some of the ills that afflict struggling humanity she was as anxious that some of the legislative medicines recommended in their pages by enthusiastic propagandists should be tried on the population of the British Isles as she was ready to experiment on the plants in her garden with sufficiently advertised patent fertilizers. She welcomed Anne into her life as she would have welcomed a new seedling into her greenhouse, with the same hope and benevolent critical interest, and to this she added personal affection.

But Francesca remarked that Anne's guardians were two too many for her when Gilbert was the cause of her leaving the second school. When Anne was nearly seventeen, and when Miss Duke, the head-mistress, and Francesca were both hoping she would pass the London Matriculation Examination and continue her education at Bedford College, Gilbert fell in love with her. She was home for the summer holidays, and had just put her hair up and lengthened her skirts. Gilbert came down from London unexpectedly, walked up from the station and into the drawing-room by the French window, and discovered a new Anne sitting on the writing-table arranging

white lilies in a tall glass. The uniformed schoolgirl with long plaits had changed into a different feminine creature with a heavy crown of fair hair and a pretty new blue dress. She neither saw nor heard him, being entirely absorbed in her determination to make the tall flowers stay in the attitudes that best displayed their beauty. Her unconsciousness as she sat there amused him, until he found he was possessed by a sudden desire to greet her by kissing the little curls on the nape of her neck. The wish surprised and embarrassed him. He hurriedly pulled himself together and jerked out his usual salutation of "Hello, Anne !"

She turned and smiled at him ; something seemed to make her a little self-conscious. He could almost have imagined that he had somehow communicated his embarrassment to her. She said, "I've got my hair up."

"So I see," he replied, but that wasn't enough for her.

"Do you like it ?" she persisted, and her large, very blue eyes pleaded almost as if her life depended upon his liking it very much.

"I like it immensely," he said, eyeing her critically.

"The worst of it is that it won't stay up," she explained. "It is always coming down ! Do you like my new shoes ?" She stretched out her pretty feet in a pair of high-heeled, silver-buckled shoes and blue silk stockings.

"I like them very much, and to save time I like the new frock too. You seem to have been going it, young woman."

"I have been scolded already for spending too much money, so you needn't any more, unless you want to. I've got an awfully nice new hat too."

“ Put it on and come for a walk. What a comfort Francesca is ! ”

While Anne was happily and candidly flirting with Gilbert with the half-confident, half-timid ways of a young bird fluttering with untried wings, Francesca was conscientiously studying her school report and a covering letter from the headmistress. The official document was the record of the irreconcilable views of the school staff. According to one mistress, Anne had great application ; another mistress recorded that she would not work. In one class she was reported to be industrious, painstaking, and intelligent ; in another idle, careless, absent-minded, and dreamy. Francesca found her mind divided between an impulse to shake Anne and a vague determination to write an article for the *Nineteenth Century* on the demerits of educational systems in general.

Francesca showed the report to Gilbert that evening.

He glanced at it impatiently and tossed it aside.

“ School marm’s drivel ! What does it matter whether Anne is top or bottom of a lot of little giggling schoolgirls in Latin and arithmetic ? She’s going to be a very charming woman. Isn’t it about time she left school ? ”

“ You’re not exactly a model guardian,” remarked Francesca. “ I shall send this on to John Halliday. *His* interest in her education is really conscientious.”

Three days later Gilbert reopened the subject himself. He had spent the time very happily with Anne. He was teaching her to drive, to play golf, and to smoke cigarettes. Francesca observed that, whatever pastime occupied them, Anne was intensely interested in whatever she was doing, or trying to accomplish,

to the exclusion of any apparent interest in her instructor ; while Gilbert was obviously more interested in his pupil herself than in her progress : her failures amused and pleased him as much as her successes.

Francesca was spending a happy afternoon marking rose-growers' catalogues. She looked up at her brother with a gracious but absent-minded smile of welcome as he came into the room and sat down on the arm of her biggest chair. She half-turned round from her writing-table with her pencil hovering over the page.

" I'm getting rid of five Frau Carl Druschkis, great fat white cabbage things without any scent. I think I shall have another Mrs. Grant and a Victor Hugo—perhaps two Victor Hugos, I love the deep red ones ; and a Killarney. . . ."

At this point she became aware that Gilbert's mind was not with her. She stopped and looked at him interrogatively.

" Isn't it about time Anne left school ? " he enquired.

Francesca raised her eyebrows.

" At sixteen ? "

" She is nearly seventeen."

" Seventeen is full young for college ; but next year you know, if she passes her Matric. . . ."

" Examinations and college are all very well for dull girls with intellects. Over-educated females are bores."

" Badly educated females are worse bores ; and Anne has an intellect, don't you make any mistake about it."

" Anne will never be a bore," replied Gilbert.

" And I don't think she's a bit keen on examinations."

" Just at present she's only keen on golf—that's

your doing, and it's holiday time. But what is in your mind? What would you propose doing with her if she left school?"

"Marrying her," said Gilbert. He spoke boldly, but looked a little anxiously at Francesca.

She laid down her pencil and rose from her chair. Her lips parted, but for a moment she did not speak.

"Marry!" she exclaimed at last. "That baby!"

She wasn't sure what she wanted to say. She had wanted Gilbert to get married, but not to anybody in particular. Theoretically she disapproved of girls marrying so young, but she was too fond of Gilbert to oppose him merely for theoretical reasons; and she was old enough to know the futility of interference in other people's love affairs—if this was a love affair that she had to deal with. She was as astonished and puzzled as she would have been if the sweet-brier bush by her window had suddenly borne hybrid tea-roses.

"My dear Gilbert! Have you really fallen in love with the child?"

"She's going to be a very charming woman."

"I'm sure she is, but why not wait until then? A couple of years!"

"And let some other fellow walk in and walk off with her? Why should I be such a fool?"

"But Anne? Is it fair to Anne?"

"Why not?"

"She's seen so few men, you and John Halliday!"

"Fate has given her two guardians obviously, intending her to marry one of them. Do you think I'd be a worse husband than John Halliday?"

"Have you proposed to Anne? What does she say?"

"I've said nothing. I thought I'd sound you first."

Francesca's face cleared.

"I believe she'd say 'no.' I'm sure the idea has never entered her head."

"Then I propose to let it enter at the first opportunity."

"If she says 'no' it won't be fair to press her."

At this moment Anne looked in at the window to announce that it had stopped raining and that she was going to practise putting on the lawn if she could only find the putter. Gilbert discovered that he was holding it, and he was out of the window, walking beside Anne down the path, before a feeble remark about wet grass had passed Francesca's lips.

Anne produced two balls from her pocket, dropped one for a target and moved the other some yards away.

"Are my hands right now?" she asked as she grasped the club.

"Not quite. Give them to me."

She obeyed, and he drew her near to him.

"Do you know that I've fallen in love with you?"

"Have you?" She seemed pleased and interested, but in no way embarrassed.

"Do you think you could love me well enough to marry me?"

She looked up at him with amazement and bewilderment in her great blue eyes, and when he stooped to kiss her she put up her lips as simply as a very young child. When the next moment she drew away from him he released her, and she asked:

"Do you mean you want me to marry you instead of going back to school?"

"I do. Will you, darling little Anne?"

"Yes, I think so," she said slowly, after considering the matter for a few seconds with a thoughtful, puzzled expression of a child pondering over a problem in mental arithmetic.

She submitted to his kissing her again, then frankly wriggled away and picked up the club.

"Now show me how to hold it," she commanded.

CHAPTER V

FRANCESCA'S method of dealing with the situation created by Gilbert's impetuosity and Anne's youth was tactful, so much so that the tact passed over Anne's head completely. She was too discreet to attempt to force the girl's confidence, and Anne was too absorbed in her own mind to discern that Francesca was appealing for something more from her than amiability and politeness. Francesca found that this, the decision to marry Gilbert, was the first responsibility the child had ever had to face. So far her life had been decided for her. As she could not discover the slightest doubt in Anne's mind that the decision was a wise one, nor any hesitations, she did not feel that her duty included the task of manufacturing any and putting them into her head. She invited John Halliday down for the week-end and explained her perplexity to him. He had heard the news from Anne herself and came down quite resolved to withhold his consent. He looked ill and tired yet absurdly young as he stood on Francesca's hearth-rug and declared that it wasn't fair and that he wouldn't have it. He seemed to think that it was Francesca's duty to put an end to it.

Francesca shook her head.

"I've no right to interfere drastically. Besides if they've both made up their minds it is no use.

She is young, but lots of girls have been married at her age, and one can only make quite sure that she really knows her own mind. She seems to. You know her better than I do, you talk to her."

Francesca was being tactful with John and he dimly appreciated it. And while he was cross-questioning Anne in the sunny garden Francesca was telling herself that, at any rate, if Gilbert married Anne now, she would be spared the problem of dealing with John if he developed a similar wish later on : at least Gilbert had an income.

John was saying very earnestly :

"Look here, Anne, it's all very well, but are you absolutely certain that you want to marry Gilbert?"

She looked surprised, and a little offended when her answer left him unconvinced.

"Why do you?" he persisted desperately. "How do you know you're in love with him? Would you have wanted to if he hadn't proposed to you?"

Anne submitted to the catechism with a docility that disturbed John. He felt that he had no right to cross-examine her, and the very fact that she didn't resent it puzzled him and quickened the dismay that had invaded his soul when he first heard the news. At last he extracted from her the confidence that she wanted to marry Gilbert because she would hate it if he married anybody else. He carried this reason back to Francesca and argued it was a proof that the child didn't know what she was about. Francesca smiled at his worried face.

"But I believe that is the only reason any woman ever marries any man—because she'd hate him to marry anybody else!"

So John had to be discontented. He could not

bear to be churlish to Anne, but he vented his disapproval on Gilbert, who took it so genially that John's discontent deepened into annoyance ; but his remonstrances had a mild effect. For Gilbert went to Anne, who was gathering sweet-peas ; he picked her up and put her on the wall that divided the garden from the orchard, the grey stone wall tapestried with bright green mosses. She was an enchanting little figure as she sat there with her arms full of pink and mauve flowers, smiling down through the flickering sunshine and shade of the laburnum tree. An old "Gloire de Dijon" rose was in full blossom among its branches and Anne leant sideways to lay her face against the warm sweet creamy roses she couldn't reach from the ground.

"Anne, I want to talk to you."

"Go on," she replied without turning her head. "I can listen quite well while I'm smelling the roses."

But he put his arms round her and made her face him as he stood looking up at her.

"Francesca and John have been telling me what a kid you are."

"I'm not. I'm seventeen."

"And they've been telling me what a sweep I am to marry you before you've seen other men that you might like better."

"What did you say ?"

"I said that I wasn't going to."

Anne flushed and looked so astonished and disappointed that Gilbert laughed out loud as his arms went round her closer.

"What an adorable baby you are !"

"I'm not !" she said furiously. "And you're squashing my sweet-peas ! *Don't*, Gilbert !"

“ I told them that I’d make it my business to show you hundreds of men before I married you, and let you change your mind if you saw anyone you liked better. Aren’t I a magnanimous chap ? And did you think I’d changed my mind and decided to send you back to school ? ”

“ I wouldn’t go.” She leaned away from him and picked a full-blown rose, and when he lifted her down and bent to kiss her she held it up before her face. He felt his lips brushed by the smooth sweet petals, and Anne escaped from him and raced across the lawn as he had seen her run when the baker chased her.

Francesca watched their courtship with tender amusement. Gilbert alternately teased Anne and petted her ; and it seemed to Francesca that Anne took the teasing with a far better grace than the petting. It was difficult to judge whether Anne disliked being caressed by Gilbert or whether she merely preferred coquetting with him. Francesca’s opinion was that the child didn’t know herself, that it amused her more to get her own way than to be made love to—and that she certainly took very kindly indeed to flirting.

Gilbert fulfilled his promise of giving Anne a glimpse of other men by devoting a week to the undertaking when Francesca took her up to London to buy her trousseau. Anne, if she had been left to herself, would have chosen to spend every hour of the day shopping, and every evening at theatres. She enjoyed herself with a glee that reconciled Francesca to the waste of time involved in purging the trousseau of the unsuitable garments Anne wished to purchase. But Anne’s time was allotted for her.

Gilbert said firmly, "I'm told you've not seen any men. You are going to see them."

So he took Anne to lunch at Simpson's and the Cheshire Cheese; to the Law Courts; down Throgmorton Avenue when the Stock Exchange was out; to the House of Commons where she had tea on the terrace and was left in the Ladies' Gallery to listen to a debate; and to a political meeting to watch the proceedings from the back of the platform.

"Now you've seen quite a representative assortment of men," Gilbert said at the end of the week. "Have you seen any you think you might like better than me?"

"Only one," she said. "The nice tall one in the House of Commons who made a speech."

With further questions he elicited the fact that his rival in Anne's affection was Mr. Balfour and that she was perfectly serious.

"You asked me," she said obstinately. "And I think I should like him awfully; and I should love to be a Prime Minister's wife, it would be a little like being a queen. But as he doesn't know me he can't want to marry me, so I suppose that settles it."

"I suppose it does," he agreed. He laughed over her with Francesca when Anne, tired out, had gone to bed early.

"Anne's taste seems to run to mature Conservative politicians. You should have seen her making eyes at old Sir Robert at tea the other day on the terrace, and now she tells me she'd like to marry the Prime Minister."

"Her taste in politicians may be sound," said Francesca; "but her taste in hats is appalling. You should have seen the erection she set her heart on

this morning. I cannot tell you what the child looked like in it ! Yet she was determined to have it. We had a regular battle over it. I never knew she had a temper."

"Oh, she has the temper of a little fury," replied Gilbert lightly. "I teased her the other day at tea-time, and went on after I'd really got a rise out of her, and I'm blessed if she didn't snatch up the bread knife ! It was the funniest thing I ever saw !"

He laughed, but Francesca looked at him uneasily.

"Gilbert ! I hope she was just in fun ?"

"In fun ? Not a bit of it ! You should have seen her eyes. She'd have gone for me with anything that came handy."

"But whatever possessed her ?"

"Her own private devil, I should think ! I'd been trying to make her ladyship kiss me. She wouldn't, so I went on teasing her. Finally, she got in a blazing rage and turned on me with the knife !" As Francesca looked rather shocked he explained, "I was a brute to tease the child. I went on too long, but she looks so pretty with her eyes flashing blue sparks."

"A temper like that oughtn't to be teased."

"A temper like that doesn't last long," he said easily. "When I took the knife away from her and asked her if she was in the habit of knifing her governesses at school she laughed, and then she very nearly cried and was very sweet. She is only a kid !"

"That is my point," began Francesca ; but he changed the subject.

Gilbert and Anne were married at the end of September.

John Halliday gave her away, and when the bride and bridegroom had caught their train to London he stood on the platform and watched it until it seemed as small as a toy train disappearing into the mellow golden distance. He looked white and grim when Francesca touched his arm and said :

"Let's come home to tea ! Is there anything more utterly flat than a wedding that's over ? It is worse than a funeral—at least it is decent to cry then."

He stared at her oddly and said :

"The worst of a wedding is that it isn't the end of anything, it's only the beginning."

"The beginning of great happiness let's hope," she said wistfully.

"That's because you're a nice woman," replied John. "Nice women are always so beastly optimistic, and it's the deuce."

"Oh come, don't decry hope. Think of dear little Anne's face and how happy she looked. Isn't happiness made out of hope mostly ?"

"Anne isn't a nice woman yet," said John. "She's only a little girl, and a naughty little girl."

"They're both awfully fond of each other," persisted Francesca cheerfully. "That is everything."

"They're both awfully fond of getting their own way," muttered John.

During their honeymoon Anne wrote the following letters :

" THE GORING HOTEL,
LONDON.

DEAR JOHN,

I promised to write to you first of all. We are staying here till next Monday. We went to Hampton Court yesterday, I'd never been and it is

lovely. We went to the Criterion last night. It was awfully nice. To-morrow we are going to have dinner at the Carlton and going to the Palace. I've never been to a music-hall. And then we are going to Paris. Gilbert is very kind to me and I am very happy. With love,

ANNE."

"DEAR FRANCESCA,

Paris is lovely. I'm enjoying myself awfully. I've no time to write because there is such a lot to see. I like the pictures best.

With love,

From

ANNE."

This was enclosed in one from Gilbert :

"MY DEAR FRANCESCA,

Paris has got into Anne's head. She is as happy as the day is long. The studios amuse her the most—queer taste for a little schoolgirl. I got an introduction to that fellow Rêvole, the latest thing in portrait painters, and we went there. He was very polite, like all these Frenchmen; admired Anne I fancy; the child looks awfully pretty in her new hats; and Anne took a sudden wild, mad interest in his pictures. I couldn't get her away. She wanted to know how he did them! He was so flattered by her interest that he introduced us to some other artists, and now Anne's one and only idea is pictures and more pictures. We are going the round of some of the most famous studios, and have been to several amusing studio evenings at

Rêvole's. He has done a very clever little sketch of Anne, did it in ten minutes. I shall have it framed. It is extraordinarily clever, in a few touches he has got the little dancing blue devils in her eyes and her rather pathetic, childish, innocent mouth. He was charmed with her, not in the least put out when she pestered him with questions about how he painted. He said, 'if Madame were living in Paris and wished to learn I should be honoured to have her for a pupil.' It always amuses me to hear Anne called 'Madame.' I'm blessed if Anne didn't want to take him at his word! She begged and prayed me to let her 'learn to paint in Monsieur Rêvole's studio.' When I explained that I had a profession which happened to be at the London Bar she wanted to be left in Paris to be an art student in the Latin Quarter! Said she'd only just discovered what she really wanted to be and that was an artist. What a kid she is! I've promised to buy her a paint-box and a pinafore as soon as we're back in London and assured her there were pictures and studios there. Her reply to that was that she was quite sure they were dull ones and wouldn't amuse her. She seems thoroughly imbued with the idea that our old world was created for the sole purpose of providing a place for her to amuse herself in. Any way she's enjoying our honeymoon, bless her! and I'm more in love with her than ever.

Yours affectionately,

GILBERT."

Francesca went to London to welcome them home and to prepare Gilbert's flat for their reception. He

had the top part of a small house in Bedford Row, and the owner of the house, who lived somewhere among the offices underneath, was his housekeeper and cook. She was prepared to tolerate Anne and approved of Francesca's rearrangement of the rooms. She, Mrs. Mackenzie, was a taciturn soul with a lugubrious outlook on life. It was understood that the late Mr. Mackenzie's conduct had not been perfect—not that she ever said a word against him, but she tightened her already thin lips, and shook her head when husbands or matrimony were the topics of conversation, like a consulting specialist over unfavourable symptoms in a case. Francesca had the impression that she would have been sorry for Anne if loyalty had not staked out a priority claim on her pity for Gilbert.

Francesca filled their rooms with Michaelmas daisies and chrysanthemums from her garden, exacted a promise from them to spend Christmas with her and left them to settle down.

"If you can call it settling down," Gilbert wrote a fortnight later, "the trick is done. Anne has joined an art class in Chelsea."

CHAPTER VI

ANNE'S studio career was the indirect result of Gilbert's attempt to introduce her into his social world. His friends called upon her, and he took her on Sunday afternoons to return their calls, and accepted various invitations to dinner. They dined with his godfather, Hurrell Woodall, who lived with a wife and three daughters in a grim house at Emperor's Gate ; at Hampstead with Gilbert's oldest friend, Frank Winslow, the senior partner in the firm of Winslow and Crowley ; and with the Charles Blakes, who lived in a flat on Campden Hill ; and at all these dinner parties Anne was bored and unhappy. The Woodalls were all keen politicians : Anne was not at all sure whether she was a Liberal or a Conservative. She was shy and silent. She had not the social education that would have enabled her to deal with her own inexperience, and was too honest to pretend to knowledge that she had not ; besides, she was clever enough to see the dangers of adventuring recklessly among unknown subjects. The entire family classified her as uninteresting, and Anne knew it, and resented it, and took a keen dislike to them.

Mrs. Winslow was literary, and so were her friends. At her dinner-table the conversation turned on books and their writers. Anne, having been kept by John Halliday and at school on a diet of classics, knew

nothing more modern than George Eliot. None of the books mentioned and discussed had Anne read. Her hostess tried to be polite to the little bride and to include her in the conversation, but was baffled by Anne's cheerful ignorance of the names of Thomas Hardy and George Meredith. The whole company evidently thought Anne stupid, and her ignorance became less cheerful : she grew depressed. Had she been really stupid her self-esteem would have lifted her above the dismal sense of failure that oppressed her ; as it was she felt mortified.

The Blakes were musical. Anne was not. She hated concerts, and said so naïvely. After dinner there were songs in the drawing-room. Anne was so bored that she first yawned, and then consoled herself with a book. The evening before, at the Winslows, her ignorance of current literature had appalled her even more than it had surprised her hosts : on the Blakes' table lay a book by one of the authors they had discussed, Thomas Hardy. Anne took it up and read it steadily, regardless of the musicians at the grand piano who were singing strange songs in German. German and music were both unknown languages to her, and she became interested in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, and then absorbed in it to the exclusion of everything else that was going on around her. Mrs. Blake thought her rude. Gilbert realised this and resented it.

He scolded her in the hansom on their way home. It was the first time he had criticised her, and Anne, whose young vanity was already sore with the experiences of three unsuccessful evenings, grew suddenly angry.

"I don't care what they thought of me!" she

retorted furiously. "Why should I care? I hated them! It was abominably bad manners of them to let those silly asses sing all that rot when I didn't want to hear them. I shall never go to their hideous house again, and if I have to go out to any more dinner parties I shall take a book with me and read all through dinner as well as in the drawing-room."

Gilbert was not prepared for her rage, and with calm superiority pointed out that the music had been magnificent, that the Blakes were most courteous, hospitable hosts, and that Anne's attitude to excellent dinners was absurd. At this point in his discourse she interrupted him again.

"I'm not listening to you," she said, leaning out over the apron of the cab. "I don't care how much they pay their beastly cook. I'd rather stay at home in peace with a book and have a piece of cake and an apple on the hearthrug, at least I shouldn't have people bawling at me all the evening."

"Your love of books is a bit sudden!" he said ironically. "Yesterday you gave the Winslows the impression that you never opened one. I nearly had to explain that you had learnt to read."

That taunt hurt her. She turned her head away lest he should see her lips tremble. The hansom swung round the corner and stopped at their door, and she jumped out before Gilbert had found the fare. When he opened the door with his latchkey she ran upstairs two steps at a time. Mrs. Mackenzie and her young assistant had retired to bed in their own part of the house downstairs. Gilbert turned on the light in their sitting-room and sat down in his arm-chair. He had heard Anne slam the bedroom door, and decided to await her next move. He read an article

in the *Spectator*, and listened intently. He could not hear her moving about.

Gilbert's knowledge of the quarrels of married life had been acquired mainly from the desultory reading of novels and magazines on railway journeys, and on the theories thus gleaned he proposed to practise. He sat on reading the *Law Times* when he had finished the *Spectator*, waiting for a penitent Anne to steal into the room and sue for pardon—that was the way of all well-regulated wives in all the novels he could recall at the moment. When an hour passed without bringing any sign of Anne, penitent or impenitent, his memory of magazine heroines suggested another solution of the situation: she had possibly gone to bed to sob herself to sleep. He looked at the clock once or twice, but hardened his heart; if she could not bring herself to the proper frame of mind and come to him and apologise for her foolishness he would not go to her. He would let the wrong-headed little sinner cry herself to sleep: it was what strong-minded, firm husbands did in books, and if Anne was not the well-regulated wife of romance he was determined to play the strong-minded, firm husband. At twelve o'clock he decided that Anne had had more than time to carry out her part of the programme, and he put out the lights and opened the bedroom door, very cautiously so as not to waken her.

But the room was light, and Anne was sitting wide awake and fully dressed in an arm-chair by the fire, reading. She didn't look up from her book until he said, with sarcasm to cover his irritation:

"Are you proposing to sit up all night?"

"I can't undo my frock," she replied in a very small, cold, hard voice.

The explanation was so unexpected, unanswerable, and disconcerting that it brought Gilbert from the realm of theory and romance to practical domestic realities with a jar he never quite forgot.

"Come here!" he said, and his voice was that of a nurse with a naughty child, not a husband with an exasperating wife. Anne came, and while his fingers wrestled with tiny hooks and eyes fairly skilfully, for he was getting used to her trousseau-frocks, he reflected that wives in books must either have dresses that were not fastened up at the back, or female domestic staffs that did not disappear irrevocably into the basement at ten o'clock. When the fragile pink dress was unfastened his annoyance had been vanquished by a tender amusement over the situation, and he touched her shoulder with his lips. Then, as Anne flushed, he put his arms round her waist, and she turned to him and held up her face. There was defiance and mutiny in her eyes, but her sensitive mouth, that was still sulky, quivered pathetically. At that moment he could no more have said a harsh word to anything so small and soft and sweet as Anne than he could have struck her. So their quarrel ended in silence and kisses; and Anne learned that she could disarm Gilbert without surrendering one inch of ground herself, which was not the lesson he had determined to teach her.

It was after this episode that she quietly set to work to study painting. Somehow, during the dinner at the Woodalls', she had acquired, from a silent young man who was a fellow-sufferer from inability to follow the political conversation with intelligence, the information that a certain Benjamin Tindale was the most successful member of a wonderful group of

artists who despised the Royal Academy and exhibited pictures in the New Gallery and International Exhibitions instead. Anne's ignorance was profoundly innocent. She did not venture to despise the Royal Academy herself, but she decided that any artist who was sufficiently great to be able to look down upon such a ponderously well-established institution must be a very big gun indeed and might be amusing. So she went to Mr. Benjamin Tindale and asked him to take her as a pupil; and as that grey-bearded giant of sixty had a very soft corner in his heart for pretty little girls of seventeen with appealing blue eyes, he overlooked the fact that he demanded a high standard of ability from tyros who wished to work in his school. He made an exception for Anne, not because her drawing showed promise, for at this time it emphatically did not, but because her face was so alive with beseeching earnestness that he was afraid her eyes would fill with tears if he refused.

If determination and enthusiasm always counted as much as successful moralists assure their disciples that they do, Anne ought to have proved to be, if not a great artist, a successful painter. She threw herself into her work like a small and earnest gladiator out to slay the lions in her path for the glory of the battle. Unfortunately for her ambition, although she had an infinite capacity for taking pains, she showed very little talent, except for cajoling lenient verdicts on her efforts from the usually stern critic in whose art school she had established herself. But she worked hard, and enjoyed herself immensely. She wore a soft, untrimmed black felt hat like a Nonconformist minister, short full skirts when short full skirts were

not fashionable, collarless blouses and strange-coloured neckties.

But while her fellow-students were dingy and untidy, and wore dull, faded garments, she improved on the style by wearing her strange clothes with her smartest Paris shoes and stockings, and substituting bright, clear colours for the dingy greens and yellows the other students affected. She looked as if she had stepped out of an illustration in some children's book of fairy tales. Francesca, making a flying visit to London to attend the annual meeting of a Suffrage Society, met her small sister-in-law in the street and protested to Gilbert privately.

"You oughtn't to encourage the child's craze," she said.

"I assure you she requires no encouragement whatever," he replied. "I suppose she'll get tired of it in time."

"But it is so exaggerated; look at the way she dresses! What does she look like?"

"Very pretty, when you've got over blinking at her."

Francesca laughed, but shook her head.

"That is it. Why must she make one blink at her? Why must she go off at this weird tangent and spend her days in studios?"

"Totally unexpected effect of a honeymoon in Paris. How was I to know what way it would take her? I'm thanking my lucky stars it is something quiet. Supposing she'd taken it into her head she wanted to be a musician and had insisted upon learning the fiddle? She'd have practised it all day and all night. She can't do anything by halves, can't Anne."

Francesca was an earnest subscriber to the main tenets of the new faith that was being decorously proclaimed by pioneers in carefully selected drawing-rooms—the faith that women had the right to use their own judgment, and be personally, economically, and politically independent. On principle she agreed to these dogmas, but when she found her own little sister-in-law practising the creed, not because she knew anything about it but because she was naturally wilful, she was not pleased. And as it was no use being angry with Anne, who was obviously erring from lack of sense due to her youth and inexperience, she was annoyed with Gilbert. His lazy, good-tempered query: “Well, what do you expect me to do about it? Slap her?” silenced her; but she went to her suffrage meeting in a dissatisfied mood, and only a latent sense of humour kept her from uttering the doubts in her mind as to whether it wouldn’t be better to postpone giving women independence until men had acquired enough sense to see they didn’t do foolish things, and whether in any case it wouldn’t be desirable to extend such independence only to young women in other people’s families, not in one’s own.

CHAPTER VII

JOHN HALLIDAY disapproved very strongly of Anne's artistic pursuits when they came to his knowledge—not that he minded her learning to paint, but he objected to her associates at the studio. He met her in the King's Road, Chelsea, one morning in January, walking with a thin young man whom he afterwards described as “a revolting mixture of a French apache, an Italian brigand, and the lowest type of Fabian Society crank.” The young man, whose name was Austin Heddle, wore a slouch hat, a long dark cloak, and a large black stock tied in a bow under his pointed shaven chin. He had long straight dark hair, keen eyes set too close together in a thin white face, and John took a violent dislike to him. He could paint, had a clever tongue, and a taste and an instinct for what was unusual in art, life, and literature. Anne found him amusing, and was flattered by his attentions. She invited him to Bedford Row and introduced him to Gilbert, who regarded him with the benevolent toleration he would have extended to a stray mongrel puppy if Anne had brought any such animal home with her.

John, although he had a catholic taste in acquaintances himself, had a different and quite intolerant standard in his mind for Anne. At this time he was living in lodgings in the Euston Road. The house

had a narrow strip of front garden full of marigolds in the summer. That was why he chose it: of the gardens next door, one was full of tombstones, as the owner was a monumental mason, and the one on the other side was mainly occupied by a large board that advertised the wholly imaginary comforts that might be expected in the house behind it by single gentlemen who had one shilling and sixpence to spend on bed and breakfast, and the desire to pass the night in a residence whose windows were neither opened nor washed. John, with almost empty pockets, in search of a home, had eyed the marigolds with pleasure. Their round golden faces had looked so cheerful and so honest, between the probably pious lies on the grimy tombstones to the west of them, and the certainly impious lies on the faded board to the east of them, that he had gone up the flagged path towards the door that bore the legend "Rooms to let" on a card in the fanlight. The card reminded him of Lennox Terrace and Anne, and he had taken the rooms in an absent-minded way, thinking not of their cleanliness nor their rent, though they happened to be moderately cheap and fairly clean, but of how much he was going to miss Anne for the rest of his life. For his vague day-dream of making a large income quickly and easily and having Anne to live with him had deserted him. The knowledge that large incomes were not made quickly and easily, or that he was not going to be the sort of man with the knack of making them that way, came to him as an unpleasant certainty to be accepted philosophically; but the realisation that he had lost Anne was a blow that he could not face so calmly. He shrank from facing it at all for a long time, consoling himself by

imagining all sorts of fantastically unlikely incidents and events that would readjust the universe, undo the past, and land Anne back on his hands: he deliberately thought of it in those words, he wanted Anne "back on his hands": it was part of the mental game of not facing things. Somehow something would happen and Anne would be given back to him again. And then, when nothing dramatic happened, he admitted to himself that it was just as well while he was making his way. He was spending the greater part of his days getting shown out of newspaper offices, and the greater part of his nights writing short stories that came back through the post with the fidelity of homing pigeons. When Anne married he readjusted his dreams. He attempted quite honestly to rejoice over the marriage, altruistically because a good-looking, good-tempered husband with an adequate income and an assured position seemed desirable possessions for his protégée, and selfishly because the marriage brought Anne to London. He struggled for weeks between a passionate rebellion against the idea of his little Anne marrying at all, and a genuine desire to extend the protection of his love and friendship to her husband. He realised he could only have a share of Anne in his life by making room for Gilbert; so he made room. And in these reconstructed dreams he saw Gilbert playing the part of a sort of masculine and indulgent nursery governess to Anne under his spiritual and mental guidance and direction. He extended his patronage to Gilbert under the happy delusion that Gilbert would desire it and be properly grateful for his help in managing Anne. He felt baffled and rebuffed when he went to Bedford Row to find Gilbert quite

genially but unmistakably prepared to patronise him, and in no obvious need of his advice or help in any way. His comfort was that Anne was serenely happy.

Her friendship with Austin Heddle annoyed him furiously and he was angry with Gilbert. He told himself that Gilbert was not looking after Anne properly if he allowed her to associate with such a fantastic cad ; but when it came to the point he felt some delicacy about informing a husband of five months that he was neglecting his wife. He tried to inoculate Anne with his own opinions of young Heddle, only to find that his views interested and amused her, but influenced her not at all. In fact, she was evidently pleased that he took the matter seriously. Gilbert treated everything and everybody connected with the studio as a very mild joke, and, as the more advanced students in the art school treated her presence there as a joke, John's solemnity on the subject soothed her.

One Sunday morning in the early spring, when a bright sun was showing London how grey and grimy a thing a city can look in March, and a soft wind from the Surrey hills was asking London why it didn't stir a little and give the earth it was standing on a chance to breathe and to send forth daisies and primroses, John was strolling down the Euston Road with a light heart and two guineas in his pocket,—a surprise two guineas, the result of a totally unexpected lapse on the part of an editor of an evening paper who had accepted some verses, printed, and paid for them,—when he met Gilbert ; Gilbert in a Norfolk suit with a bag of golf-clubs over his shoulder.

"I'm just catching the eleven-thirty for Bushey, fresh air and exercise," he said.

"Where's Anne?" asked John.

"At home with a headache; she wouldn't come. Why don't you go along and look her up?"

"But if she's ill?"

"Oh, she's not ill—just lazing." He hurried off to the station, and John glared after him indignantly. To marry Anne—to neglect her—to go off for a day's pleasure and leave her alone ill! Accusations formed themselves rapidly in his mind as he strolled along to Bedford Row, where he found Anne curled up on a sofa with a book, eating chocolates, and looking remarkably well. She seemed pleased to see him.

"I met Gilbert. He said you'd a headache."

"I haven't a headache. I just felt sick," said Anne candidly, "and I couldn't be bothered to go golfing. I'm all right now."

He looked at her wistfully and then went to the window.

"It's such a jolly day, won't you come out with me somewhere?"

"Where? Not if it's a concert."

"No, out of doors. Look here, Anne, I know of a jolly little inn near Hendon. Let's drive out to lunch there. It will do you good."

"I'd love to!"

He had expected to have to use greater persuasion, but she was ready in two minutes.

In those days the Tube had not been built and beyond Hampstead there was open country, fields and hedges, and country houses standing in walled gardens where thrushes and blackbirds sang in old

trees. The elms were in flower and the sun showed their rounded tops red against the blue sky ; there were glimpses of daffodils in the gardens, and hyacinths, and myriads of crocuses. They had lunch at a square white inn between Hendon and Edgware, and they were both enchantingly happy. They ate cold chicken, and rhubarb tart and cream, in a long, low, green-walled room whose only other occupant or decoration was a plaster pike in a glass case ; outside the open windows bees hummed about some early tulips and a long green garden stretched down to a little stream. John had the pleasure of telling Anne about his poem and reading it to her :

I have seen Spring—a slender wistful maiden
In the wet woods, a dryad midst the trees.
Then the hearts of the old, old trees did throb with love,
And love is life, and they stirred, till all above
In the ocean of air, from a riot and mist of buds
They wrought a net to snare the faithless breeze.

I have seen Spring on her knees with her fair head bowed,
While the tears from her dear blue eyes
Fell rain on the breast of her dead, cold, mother-friend,
Earth,
And violets grew ; for what is death is birth,
As Earth and the violets know—
Mother Earth and her babes are wise.

I have seen Spring asleep with lilac buds in her hair,
Pale primrose stars kept watch about her bed :
But the Sun-god saw her as she slept, and poured his gold
Over the green o' the fields, a wealth untold
Of buttercups ; for the Sun-god desired the maiden
And kissed her sleeping—then she woke, and fled.

Another poet might have been less satisfied with Anne's admiration, which was divided equally between his cleverness in writing it and his cleverness in getting two guineas for it ; but her praise was

very sweet to him. They discussed books and explored each other's minds. Anne was always eager for new knowledge, new ideas; the hunger of her young mind was indiscriminating.

After lunch they walked in the garden where a moss-grown path bordered by early spring flowers, red and white double daisies, wallflowers, and double daffodils, led to a wilder part beyond a thick box-hedge where there was a yellow and green carpet of celandine, and a tangle of willow bushes budding into soft, round, velvet-grey catkins. A pink almond tree was in blossom, and Anne reached up for a little spray of the flowers. Anne's adorable prettiness as she stood under the tree seemed to epitomise the spring. John's heart suddenly beat very fast and he lost control over it, and his head. All the morning he had been weaving a fairy-tale to himself in which Gilbert's imagined neglect of Anne, Anne's youth, and helpless innocence, and daring wilfulness, and his own love for her, and his desire to protect her from everything and everyone in the world, somehow led to a romantic happiness warranted to last for ever—only in the fairy-tale he took her in his arms and kissed her: and in the garden his arms moved and he was just going to touch her, and tell her how he loved her, when Anne, who had been very quiet for a few minutes, suddenly held out the twig of pink blossom she had picked, and said:

“John, will you be my baby's godfather?”

His hands fell to his side and his heart seemed to stop beating as if he had pulled it down with a cord.

“Are you going to have a baby?” he said stupidly, slowly.

"I shouldn't ask you to be her godfather if I weren't," retorted Anne.

"Oh, my dear! . . ." He took the hand that offered him the almond blossom in both of his. He kissed it—then he laid his hand on her shoulder, stooped, and very gently kissed her cheek.

Anne looked at him curiously, surprised and touched, and a little embarrassed by his emotion. John pulled himself together with a violent effort that left him feeling suddenly physically cold.

"It is ripping of you to ask me," he stammered. "I shall be awfully proud of a godchild."

They were both rather silent for the rest of the afternoon. John, because his castles in the air were falling down, and he was preoccupied in struggling to evolve new ones out of the chaos, and Anne was wondering what impulse had made her confide in him.

That evening when she and Gilbert were sitting over the fire, and he had recapitulated his golf score hole by hole, and she had told him of her expedition with John, she suddenly said, rather nervously :

"I asked John to be the baby's godfather."

Gilbert laid down his cigarette and stared at her.

Still more nervously Anne continued :

"He was awfully pleased—dear old John!"

"Dear old John be damned!" said her astonished husband. "Do you mean you're going to have a baby?"

"Is it likely I'd ask John to be godfather to anybody else's baby?" was Anne's answer. Then, as Gilbert was still staring at her with either wrath or surprise, or both, she added: "Don't you *want* a baby?"

"Darling, of course I want a baby!" He knelt by her and put his arms round her: "But why didn't you tell me?"

"I have told you."

"But why did you tell John first?"

"I don't know—I knew he'd be so pleased, and he was."

The baby arrived on Anne's eighteenth birthday. John had been invited to dinner, and when he got there Francesca opened the door to him and looked blankly disappointed.

"Oh, I thought you were the doctor. Do go in there to Gilbert and see what he is doing, and have some dinner."

Gilbert was industriously taking the works out of the dining-room clock.

"The beastly thing gains a bit, I'm just having a look at it," he explained.

"Look here, old chap, you'll never get it all back," said John, regarding the wheels and nuts on the table with scepticism. "Much better leave it alone."

"May as well have it all out and make a good job of it. I say," his voice trembled with anxiety and his face was drawn and white, "Anne is bound to be all right, isn't she?"

"Oh, bound to be," said John sagely; then with a sharp note in his voice he asked: "Why? She's all *right*, isn't she?"

"I suppose so—only they're all so beastly reassuring."

For three hours two helpless, haggard young men carried on an idiotic conversation in which they revealed their own fears by the very strenuousness of

their attempts to disguise them from each other, and they regaled themselves with reassuring platitudes that soothed without convincing them.

While Gilbert so wrought with the works of the dissected clock that it never kept time again, John walked to the open window. He was horribly frightened: frightened for Anne facing the terrible mysteries of birth and death alone; she was so young, a mere child—surely such things weren't for little girls to face? Mothers should be tall, broad-shouldered, robust women who had several children already—he was picturing some of the fat, untidy, easy-going mothers of families he saw shopping in the Euston Road—he wouldn't be terrified of them bringing children into the world. Then he was frightened for himself, frightened of losing Anne. If he lost Anne, he said to himself, he lost everything that made life desirable. He leaned out into the calm August night. Above the long, broken horizon-line of roofs and chimneys the orange-glow of London lights blurred the night sky, hiding the stars: but to the east, near the zenith, were constellations and there was one bright quivering star, flashing red and blue fiery points of light, that seemed to John's agonising soul less remote and more friendly than the others. He hadn't prayed much since he had said his prayers as an unhappy little boy at school, when he had prayed for miracles to happen, prayed that his mother needn't be dead any more; that his father might be changed from a rough, hard-working country surgeon into a rich and leisured general in the army who would come to fetch him away from school on a white charger; and that Euclid might be simplified by the elimination of right angles from geometry;

and when these things hadn't happened he had somehow lost his faith in prayer very much in the same way and at the same time as he had lost his belief in fairies. He had fallen into a troubled, half incredulous atheism at the age of fourteen when he had discovered Laing's *Problems of the Future* in his father's library and devoured it one Christmas holiday. He had grown out of this as he found that, while his brain accepted the diet it fed on, his imagination rebelled. Now, after steering an erratic and unpiloted course through every philosophy he came across—Epictetus, Descartes, Hegel, Kant, Spinoza—he had found the calm harbour of Neoplatonism: it had appealed to him as the intellectual faith of noble men; but to-night as he wrestled with cold, naked fear he found with a shock of dismay that his philosophy failed him. The transcendent, majestic God he had found in his wise books couldn't be expected to deflect the immutable laws of His Universe for the sake of anything so frail and insignificant as Anne, and he wanted a God Who would care and Who would work miracles if necessary. With his eyes fixed on the one friendly star in the sky he prayed in silence, instinctively using the formula that came mechanically to his brain from the habit of his childhood: "Our Father which art in heaven, please let all be well with Anne. I don't care about anything else in the world. If You'll only let her live and be happy I don't mind about anything else that happens to me. I don't mind about fame or success. I don't want anything else, so long as Anne's all right. I thought I cared about my work, and I do; but I care more about Anne. I'll give up anything, let me be a failure, only keep Anne safe and here. Don't

take her away. I don't want her myself, I just want her here in the world. . . ."

Then Francesca put a tired, happy face in at the door and said :

" You've a little son, Gilbert, and you may see Anne for a moment presently. She wanted a girl, and is inclined to be put out about it."

But when he was admitted into the presence of his wife and son, Anne had developed a great pride in the contents of the little bundle of flannel by her side. When he leant over to kiss her, she said :

" He's a very nice little boy ; but next time it must be a little girl."

" Next time ! Good heavens ! "

" I did so want twins. It would have been so nice to have had a little head at each end of the perambulator ! "

The nurse cut the conversation short and ushered him out of the room with almost as little ceremony as if she were shooing out a stray chicken.

Philip was a little thin restless baby with Anne's blue eyes and Anne's determination. He was welcomed by Gilbert, Francesca, and John not only for his own sake but because they saw in him an instrument by which might be wrought the diversion of Anne's time and attention from the studio. Gilbert and Francesca both advised her not to engage a nurse but to take care of the baby herself ; and Anne, with apparent calmness and secret misgivings, acquiesced in the arrangement which left her at the mercy of a small and vociferous tyrant six weeks old of whom she was terrified.

Pride, sheer obstinacy, dislike of ridicule kept her wrestling more or less successfully with her

son for three weeks after the departure of her own nurse. The baby had strong lungs, a firm will, and a much clearer idea of what was good for him than Anne had, so she gave in to him with nervous alacrity, until one afternoon Gilbert let himself in with his latchkey to find his home filled with sounds of despair and lamentation. Phil, in Anne's arms, was shrieking at the top of a very efficient voice, while Anne was sobbing hysterically. Gilbert with a spasm of serious alarm rushed to the bell and rang for help. Anne was crying too much to answer his frantic questions. When breathless Mrs. Mackenzie appeared, he pointed to his wife and child, and said desperately :

“What's wrong, Mrs. Mackenzie ? Is the baby dying ? ”

“Never heard of a dying baby making that amount of noise,” said Mrs. Mackenzie grimly. She took Phil from his unprotesting mother and rocked him in her arms, patting him heavily on the back. The quality of the baby's shrieks changed, the undiluted unreasoning rage and despair in his voice turned to a note of indignant self-pity and reproach, as if he found in Mrs. Mackenzie a sympathetic confidante and was satisfied to pour out a long list of grievances and complaints.

“He's sleepy, poor lamb,” said Mrs. Mackenzie as she bore him away. The receding cries grew more and more composed, until in about two minutes they ceased, and Gilbert turned to Anne :

“He's been crying for two hours ! ” she sobbed, “and I couldn't stop him.”

“But whatever is the matter ? ” He sat down beside her on the sofa and lifted her on to his knee.

"I don't know—he's a dreadful baby!"

He petted and comforted her, and as she stopped crying she said defiantly :

"I don't like babies! They're so little and difficult, and they've no manners, and they're always being sick. And it is so ungrateful of him to be good with Mrs. Mackenzie and beastly to me! I do everything I can to please him, and he's never satisfied."

Gilbert debated with himself whether Anne's need was sympathy or reproaches. The result of some minutes' reflection was a very careful attempt on his part to imbue her with some orthodox views on the ideal relationship of mother and child. He thought he was succeeding, and that she was taking the lecture very well, when a little sigh caused him to look down into the face on his shoulder. Anne was fast asleep.

The next day Gilbert requested Francesca to find an experienced nurse, and a house agent to discover a suitable house, for there was no nursery at Bedford Row. Francesca recommended Hampstead as a neighbourhood. She said there would be good air for Phil, and did not refer to its remoteness from the studio; neither did Anne: but the only house that satisfied her and that they chose eventually was in Chelsea.

Phil remained the one unconquerable subject in her realm. She adored him, but could not manage him. Francesca, who was being drawn further into the political whirlpool of the suffrage movement, came more frequently to London, and deplored the fact than Anne left Phil to the nurse and divided her time between her house and the studio. Gilbert was reconciled to it, and said :

"Why not? Anne can't deal with him and nurse can; it's what she's paid for. And the studio keeps Anne out of mischief."

"Does it?" Francesca spoke doubtfully.

"Yes; if she's messing about with chalk and things there, she isn't wanting to paint cornflowers all over my dressing-room wall."

"Cornflowers?"

"They're blue, aren't they? Anyway, whatever it was she was after, every blessed thing was getting smothered in blue paint. I put my foot down and she got in one of her furies. So for mercy's sake let her play about at the studio. That's what art schools are there for, to keep kids like Anne out of mischief."

Privately, Francesca thought that art schools were poor devices for the purpose. She had occasional glimpses of her sister-in-law's associates there. To Francesca they seemed to be selfish, conceited young people, intellectual snobs, artistic cranks and hedonists. She regretted Anne's association with them, feared that she could acquire nothing but wrong-headed moral ideas and violent opinions. Anne was so childish, her mind seemed so unformed, that Francesca would have chosen her friends for her with great care if she had had the power to wean Anne from the studio. Only gradually did she realise that these studio acquaintances of Anne's had no influence upon her at all; in fact, her attitude to the world at this period of her life was something like that of a child at the Zoo. She walked along her chosen path, as if other people were strange animals in cages. She regarded them with healthy interest and amusement, admiration or curiosity, and passed on her own way.

Francesca and John, both watching from the distance of frequent intervals, each decided that the marriage had turned out well. Anne and Gilbert were very good and very happy, and Phil was very naughty and very happy. Francesca gave more of her mind and time to the suffrage movement. John began writing a play, and went less often to Chelsea ; he began to feel he wasn't wanted. Anne only wanted Gilbert and Phil.

CHAPTER VIII

WHEN Phil was three years old he got measles, and Anne caught it too, and when they were better the doctor advised Gilbert to take them both to the seaside. Gilbert hated English seaside places. Hitherto Phil and his nurse had been sent to Francesca every summer while Gilbert and Anne went abroad. However, the doctor had a very poor opinion of foreign places as health resorts for sick British children, and he recommended the golf course at North Berwick ; so Gilbert took rooms at the Marine Hotel and transferred his family there for a month.

The hotel was full, but they were given two large adjoining rooms. The second morning Gilbert ran upstairs after breakfast to hurry Anne, who had gone to fetch her jersey and not returned. She was not in their room, and he heard her from the room next door calling him in a scared voice. He opened the communicating door and found the nurse, dressed to go out, with her bonnet awry, clinging to the wardrobe breathing heavily, while Anne timidly offered her a glass of water.

"Gilbert, do send for a doctor ! I am afraid nurse is ill. She looks so funny, and can't talk plainly. Do you think she is going to have a paralytic fit ? "

He looked at the woman in concern, approached

nearer than Anne had ventured, and then turned on Anne in contemptuous indignation.

"Can't you see the woman is drunk?" he enquired angrily.

"Nurse drunk?"

"Yes, drunk as a bargee! This is a nice thing to happen! Has she ever done it before?"

"Not that I know of. Are you sure?"

"Am I sure? Not that you know of! What a helpless little imbecile you are! You might be Phil's age. And where's he?"

Phil was under the washing-stand, quietly polishing shoes with a cake of pink soap.

"Take him out," said Gilbert. "I'll deal with this woman."

Anne was so relieved not to be called upon to deal with the nurse herself that she obeyed meekly, although she resented the censure implied by Gilbert's irritation. It wasn't *her* fault that the nurse was drunk! She always had been in awe of nurse when she was sober, she was terrified of her in her present condition. She took Phil on to the sands, and kept him there for two hours. Then she ventured back to the hotel to find out what had happened. Gilbert was congratulating himself upon having dealt with the situation in a masterly way, and had recovered his temper.

"I have sent her away; got her out of the hotel. Given her her ticket back to London and a month's wages. The chambermaid packed her things. It sobered her enough for her to catch the train. I suppose you can look after Phil yourself for the time being?"

Anne supposed so too, with private misgivings

which she was too offended to confide in Gilbert, even if she had not been too proud to admit that she was invariably defeated in contests with her son. She looked after him for the rest of the day with a success achieved mainly by means of new toys from every toy shop in High Street, including a large tin engine upon which he had set his heart and soul.

"You'll be a good boy if I buy it, won't you?" She bargained with a weakness which Phil measured with the accuracy of his years.

"I are a velly good, kind boy," he assured her. "If I met a lion and a tiger and vey wanted to eat me, I wouldn't kill vem wif a pickaxe. In course I wouldn't, not if vey was hungry poor old lions and tigers. I'd give vem a likkle piece of bread and butter."

Having issued this liberal draft on his charity to meet the unlikely claims of hypothetical wild beasts, Phil felt his conscience was at rest and that he was at liberty to take full and blissful advantage of his mother's incapacity to deal with him.

He demanded, and obtained, permission to suck the soap as his price for being bathed, insisted upon eating biscuits while he said his prayers, and upon having all his toys on a chair by his cot so that he could reach them in the night. Anne never lost her temper with Phil; he was so small and so strange that she conceded every point because she did not understand their significance, and he so evidently did.

She was rather a silent companion at dinner; she was still brooding over Gilbert's injustice in blaming her for the nurse's insobriety—she hadn't made the woman drunk! He thought she was sulking because

the charge of the child tired and irked her ; and he vaguely felt that she was ultimately responsible for the domestic catastrophe—surely it was the plain duty of a wife and mother to engage and retain sober servants ? They carefully avoided referring to the contentious subject, and Anne went to bed early in Phil's room.

In the middle of the night Gilbert was awakened by strange sounds from the next room ; first, Phil's shrill voice arguing, and Anne protesting, remonstrating ; then a loud, rattling thump of something large and made of tin falling out of bed. This was followed by a wail from Phil which turned into a muffled, half-smothered roar. Gilbert looked at his watch ; it was four a.m. He waited impatiently, to give Anne a chance of restoring peace. The roar ceased, and Gilbert laid his head on his pillow again ; but after three minutes the silence was again broken by a loud, sharp, metallic noise of hammering, and then came a crash. Gilbert jumped out of bed and opened the communicating door.

“ What on earth is this infernal noise ? ”

He switched on the light and beheld Phil sitting up in Anne's bed like a fair, ruffle-haired little angel in pink pyjamas, his countenance more innocent than that of any painted cherub. Anne was also sitting up, and with her flushed face framed with two long plaits she looked not much bigger nor much older than Phil ; but she looked distinctly guilty.

“ Phil *would* come into my bed,” she explained ; “ I let him, to keep him quiet, but he brought his engine and a lump of plasticine and the soap-dish with him. I couldn't have the plasticine in bed, it is horrid, so messy ! nor the engine, it is so hard and

uncomfortable, but when I pushed them out he cried, so I let him have the soap-dish to keep him quiet. Then he hammered with it on the brass rail and smashed it ! And the bed is full of broken china now ! ”

“ Your idea of amusing the child seems to be to let him smash up the hotel ! I wonder you haven’t woken the whole place in your attempts to keep him quiet ! Why the devil did you give him the soap-dish ? ”

“ I didn’t give it to him, he’d got it.”

Gilbert picked Phil up and put him into his cot.

“ Now you lie still, you little beggar, and go to sleep.”

“ I want Jimmy,” retorted Phil.

“ Who’s Jimmy ? ” demanded Gilbert helplessly.

“ It is his horrid fur monkey. Do find it for him.”

Gilbert found it under the bed, and tossed it to his small son. Then he picked up Anne from among the shattered remains of the soap-dish as easily as he had lifted Phil, and put her into her own bed in the next room. He went back to threaten or cajole Phil into silence, for he was beginning to wail :

“ I want my mummy ! I want my mummy ! ”

“ You can’t have her, old chap ! Poor mummy can’t sleep in a bed full of broken china ; you shouldn’t have broken the soap-dish.” As this line of argument was obviously unconvincing, Gilbert added firmly, “ You’ve had mummy a long time, now I want her.”

The straightforward selfish claim Phil could appreciate ; he hesitated and attempted to bargain.

“ I’ll have mummy,” he suggested, “ and you can take ve pillow and pretend it’s mummy.”

"If you don't shut up and go to sleep," Gilbert threatened, "I'll spank you!"

"I'm your dear likkle boy!" said Phil. "Isn't you very pleased wif me? I wants *you* to stay wif me!"

"I'll stay with you till you're asleep again, if you'll hurry up about it."

Gilbert shivered by the cot, patting the little shoulder for five minutes. Then Phil fell asleep, and Anne was asleep too.

Anne was so tired that she slept till eight o'clock. When she woke she was conscious of a suspiciously peaceful silence. Gilbert had gone out to bathe, and there was no sound of Phil from the next room. She jumped out of bed and ran to the open door. The room was empty, but in the middle of the floor was a small pink heap, Phil's little pyjamas. There was nowhere in the room for him to hide, and the further door was ajar. She heard a little squeal of delight from the passage. She thrust her bare feet into bedroom slippers and looked out into the corridor just in time to see Phil, without a shred of clothing on, scamper round the corner. She snatched up her blue dressing-gown and pursued him.

Anne's one idea was to retrieve Phil somehow before Gilbert returned. She ran along the passage but the child had disappeared, and she glanced despairingly at the avenue of closed doors. Into which room had Phil adventured? She felt too shy to knock at them all in turn. It never occurred to her to delegate her quest to a chamber-maid. She passed slowly and reluctantly along the passage, listening intently for Phil's voice, and at last she heard him chattering away behind one of the closed

doors as if he had found a sympathetic audience. A pair of slim, high-heeled shoes on the mat gave her courage to knock—at least he had gone into a woman's room. A voice said, "Come in," and Anne, feeling very shy, opened the door and said: "I'm so sorry." Then she stopped, for there was Phil, naked and unashamed, standing by the bedside of a strange woman, singing:

"If I planted a likkle seed of love
In the garden of your heart."

"Come in!" said the stranger, as she saw Anne hesitating on the threshold. "I call this really friendly! Are there any more of you? Your little brother is just too sweet."

"He's not my little brother," explained Anne, "I'm his mother! and I'm awfully sorry he's been so naughty."

Anne, with her hair in two long, thick pigtails and her straight blue kimono, looked like a child, and the woman stared at her curiously.

"His mother? I'm sorry! but you look about twelve years old. Must you take him away?"

Anne captured Phil, apologised for him, and carried him back, trying to stifle him, for he began to sing: "My dear likkle girlie, girlie." Outside her bedroom door she ran into Gilbert.

"Now what are you two kids doing?" he enquired. When he heard her hurried version of Phil's escapade, he said grimly:

"No wonder his nurse took to drink! I shall get another from Edinburgh, and engage her to look after you both—otherwise we shall be getting turned out of the hotel."

At breakfast Anne saw the woman whose room they had invaded come into the coffee-room, and feeling shy, she busied herself over Phil's boiled egg. Just as she passed near their table Phil remarked, in the high treble voice he only used when he was feeling particularly virtuous, and which carried easily over the whole dining-room :

"If I found a chicken in my egg I wouldn't eat it, I'd keep it for a likkle pet."

His new friend laughed, and paused by his chair :

"Well, if I find a chicken in my egg I shall know what to do with it, I shall give it to you."

She smiled at Anne, who explained to Gilbert :

"This is the lady the dreadful child ran away to this morning."

"And she's got pink wibbons in her nighty-gown ! " was Phil's contribution to the courtesies of the moment.

"I can only apologise for my family," said Gilbert. "And assure you that I'm catching the first train to Edinburgh to engage a nurse. Ours failed us yesterday."

"I think your family is too sweet to need any apologies. And surely you are Mr. Gilbert Trevor ? I recognise your likeness from a portrait in our house. We are your tenants at Crane Hall, I am Mrs. Dalliac."

The acquaintanceship developed into friendship. Gilbert found a staid, placid Scots nurse, who took charge of Phil with a gentle but firm hand, and Anne was free to enjoy herself. Mrs. Dalliac was a warm-hearted, sensible woman, who knew what she wanted and was accustomed to get it without much trouble. She took a great fancy to Anne, and swept away her shyness with kindly, high-handed methods. She was

about twelve years older than Anne, tall, dark, good-looking, and elegantly dressed. At the end of a week she was calling Anne by her Christian name, and telling her how to do her hair. Anne responded shyly and more slowly ; but she had gained self-confidence since her marriage, and Juliet Dalliac gave her more.

“ Why, child, with those glorious eyes and your lovely hair you’d be a regular little beauty if you only knew it.”

Anne blushed and laughed.

“ It’s much better you should hear it from me than from men,” remarked Mrs. Dalliac. “ There I go, you seem such a child I’m always forgetting you’re married. Doesn’t your husband tell you how pretty you are ? ”

“ He likes me,” said Anne naively, “ but he says I’m a vain monkey as it is.”

“ My brother says you’re like a Greuze picture.”

Whereupon Anne took an immediate liking for Lawrence Ackroyd, K.C., M.P., that was the beginning of his infatuation for her, and of her initiation into the arts and joys of serious flirtation. So far in her life she had been quite content to flirt with Gilbert, or Phil, or Francesca, or the cook, or anybody whom she wished to conciliate at the moment ; but the chivalrous and undisguised admiration of the grave, middle-aged man gave her a new experience, and Anne welcomed such new experiences.

Lawrence Ackroyd, a bachelor of forty-five, was an eminent man in his own profession, and the member for a London constituency. He came to North Berwick tired out after a strenuous session and an arduous case in the Divorce Court. The clay of intrigue, harshness, unhappiness, and selfishness in which he

had dug for the roots of truth and justice had wearied him. Instinctively he had come North in search of sea, strong salt winds, and the soothing influence of solitary rounds of golf on smooth green turf by the grey shore. It annoyed him to find in the hotel London people he knew, all anxious to congratulate him upon his case and to talk scandal or golf. Then his sister introduced him to Anne. Anne had not read the case, played golf more badly than hitherto he had believed possible, and was not interested in politics. These three novelties refreshed him; she was shy, younger than any woman he had ever met, and unspoilt. He had never seen more beautiful eyes nor prettier hands and feet. He found himself watching her as one watches a charming child, from mere idle æsthetic pleasure. Then he liked her voice, which was soft and gentle, and he sought her out to talk to her, the first time as a reason for avoiding conversation with anyone else. When he found she was intelligent he drew her out for the amusement of hearing what anything so artless thought of the world. In a few days he was quite openly worshipping her, and Anne was accepting his adoration as innocently as it was offered. He insisted upon coaching her in golf, and he, one of the best amateur players in England, spent hours on the Ladies' Links teaching Anne how to use her clubs.

His sister laughed at him, and said, "If I were that child's husband I should take her away before the flirtation goes any further."

He frowned impatiently.

"Don't accuse me of the vulgarity of flirtation. If you knew how I loathed the idea . . . besides, little Mrs. Trevor isn't that sort of woman."

His sister opened her brown eyes very wide.

"What sort of woman? Any sort of woman can flirt if she's put to it, and I'm sure Anne flirted with her nurse before she either walked or talked."

"Ah, well, perhaps I've grown to attach an ugly meaning to an innocent word."

"Anne is an innocent baby, but she'd be half-witted if she didn't know she'd got eyes that could coax the barbs off a wire fence."

"It is her mouth that is her really appealing feature." Then, in reply to a mischievous smile, he explained, "At the Bar I've got the habit of watching people's mouths, they are the betraying feature. I find women and clean-shaven men make the best witnesses. Some types of pretty women have lips that make a man wonder whether she'd let him kiss her when he looks at them. Now Mrs. Trevor is not that type, her lips make you wonder what they are going to say."

"You've got it *very* badly!" said his sister disrespectfully. "Any way, she's a darling, and I'm going to ask them to come to stay when we get back."

"Do. Trevor seems a very good fellow," he replied imperturbably. "I wonder what sort of a junior he is? I must try to put some work in his way."

Gilbert was rather proud of Anne's conquest. He teased her privately, but he reasoned that as she was safely in love with him there was no harm in her attracting other men, especially if they were eminently respectable counsel; and he was careful not to discourage a friendship with one who so plainly could be of much use to him in his profession.

Lawrence Ackroyd never made love to her. He was tired, and she refreshed him. If she had been

ten years younger he would have made castles in the sand on the beach for her amusement and his own. The first time he took her round the big links after a week's instruction he paused on the way home and made her rest.

"Aren't I a nuisance?" she enquired. "Wouldn't you rather play with someone who'd give you a better game?"

He smiled, for it had not occurred to her that, as far as golf went, she was giving him no game at all.

"I'd rather go round the links with you than with anyone in North Berwick. Will you come round again to-morrow morning? Or is it selfish to monopolise you again?"

"Oh no. I'd like to. Gilbert won't want me. I don't play well enough for him."

"You're improving wonderfully. You're a capital pupil, and a most kind companion."

"Am I kind?"

"Yes, you let me forget there are such places as Law Courts and Houses of Parliament."

"I believe that if I were a lawyer I shouldn't want to forget them; I should be so interested in it all."

"You might be till you were as tired of it as I get. I sometimes feel that I am just part of the price civilisation has to pay for its failures."

"You mean that people don't go to lawyers till they've made a muddle of everything themselves?" reflected Anne. "But doesn't it feel nice to put things right?"

"Does one put things right?" he said. "My last case has meant the wreck of a marriage that was once as happy as yours I dare say."

"But you won your case?" she replied: she had gleaned this from Gilbert.

"It might have been better for my client if I'd lost it."

"But not better for you."

He laughed. Her simplicity soothed him; a more sophisticated young woman would have supplied the sympathy he sought.

"Yours is the philosophy of youth and health and a clear conscience. Personally, in my morbid moods, I'd sweep my profession into that rough grey sea."

"Gilbert sometimes says it is a rotten profession, but he means that he doesn't get enough briefs. You don't mean that."

"I mean that the law is a machine for perpetuating and standardising some of our worst mistakes."

"But haven't there got to be prisons and divorce courts for some people?"

"For them as likes them. I don't know that I've any substitute for prison ready; but I'd have no divorce court."

"Why not, if people want it?" Anne had read some of Francesca's suffrage papers, and had gathered that, in the opinion of those entitled to judge, it was a beneficent institution.

"Marriage is protection for the woman—her only protection. If it is regarded merely as a civil contract, it is for life. I'd enforce civil penalties for a breach of contract, but I'd have no dissolution. Believe me, nobody wants to be divorced unless they want to marry somebody else. We're suffering from too much sentimentality nowadays, and we hate the thought of making people dree their own weird. We shrink from pain. It is all part of the materialism of the

last century. We call it rationalism, God help us, the most irrational philosophy ever conceived! It is paganism without its courage, Christianity shorn of its essential doctrine of vicarious atonement. Where it will lead us to I don't know; either through greed and envy back to primordial savagery, or through calamity and suffering to Catholicism. There is no physical millennium at the end of the road we're journeying." He broke off abruptly. "I didn't mean to inflict this sort of thing on you. You won't want to play with me again if I bore you like this."

"Yes, I shall. I like people talking to me."

"It isn't my habit. Only the contrast between you as you sit here, so young and happy, and gay and hopeful, and the woman who has been so much in my mind, was almost painful. She had eyes rather like yours, blue and wide apart; only there was fear in hers, and hardness and rebellion."

Anne pulled a handful of thyme from the fine soft turf and crushed it in her fingers. She was looking across the Forth to the long blue line of the Fifeshire hills, and he was watching her.

"That's why I won't punish Phil when he is naughty. He is awfully naughty, but I couldn't bear to hurt him or make him afraid. People shouldn't be made afraid, any way not little children, by punishment."

"You weren't when you were a child?"

"No. I was very naughty, I remember, but there was nobody who cared."

William Dalliach joined his wife eventually. He had been detained by a strike among his workpeople. He was a short, stout, middle-aged man with kind eyes and a round red face. Anne wondered how Juliet

Dalliac could love such an ugly husband, and felt very proud of Gilbert's height and good looks. But the little man was good-natured and hospitable, and devoted to his handsome wife : he went out of his way to be pleasant to her new friends, and cordially seconded her invitation when she pressed them to visit Crane Hall.

" Unless of course it will make you hate us, seeing us in possession of your house ? "

" Not a bit of it," said Gilbert. " I only hope you'll stick to it. I can't afford to live in it ; but I should like to show the place to Anne."

" Why didn't you bring her before ? When will you come ? Fix your own time. We'll ask my brother-in-law at the same time in the autumn. He doesn't shoot, so he'll be company for your wife."

" Don't the foxes rather interfere with the game ? " Gilbert asked. " When I was a boy the place was overrun with them."

" The hunt keeps them down a bit. Juliet hunts. I'm all for keeping in with everyone. Any sort of sport for my money. That's my motto. Keep in with everyone if you want to get in yourself. Give me a county constituency."

" Are you thinking of standing ? "

" At the next election."

The visit was fixed for October ; but politics interfered and saved the lives of many pheasants. The lord-lieutenant of the county died, and his nephew, the county member, succeeded to his peerage and estates, and the unexpected by-election precipitated William Dalliac on to the political stage before he was quite ready. He had looked forward to working up the constituency for another two years,

and was rather nervous when Gilbert and Anne arrived ; for Juliet Dalliac telegraphed at the last moment to say the shooting-party was postponed, but she begged them to come just the same and help with the election.

Crane Hall looked its best in the autumn. The house was draped with trails of crimsoning virginia creeper, and late pink monthly roses blossomed luxuriantly in the sheltered angles of its walls. The flower-beds were still full of tangled colour with heavy-headed dahlias ; bushes of Michaelmas daisies of all shades of purple and mauve ; tall penstemon, spires of pink and crimson bells ; masses of golden rod and white Japanese anemones, and giant hollyhocks. The silver-wet lawns were patterned every morning with pale yellow leaves from five tall limes, where the rooks built, and the chestnut trees in the grounds looked as if little fragments of sunset had been caught in their branches and stayed there, staining the great leaves pink and red. Here and there the boughs of the great beech trees were tipped with bronze and gold. Anne gazed round her rather wistfully.

“ I wish we could live here ! ” she said. “ It would be so nice for Phil.”

“ Phil seems to me to do very well where he is,” replied Gilbert ; “ and it wouldn’t be at all nice for Phil if we all had to migrate to the workhouse at the end of three months, as we certainly should if we tried to live here. Besides, you’d hate it in the winter. It is beastly cold and dull.” He hurriedly tried to coax the idea out of Anne’s head before it got firmly planted. When ideas took root there they grew apace and were apt to bear fruit.

“ How much money would it cost ? ”

"More than I'm likely to have for a long time. Be thankful the place is let."

"But how much?"

"I don't know. All I know is that nearly all the rent is swallowed up in estate charges before I get it."

"It would be nice for Phil to be brought up here." Anne had a way of incorporating one impregnable clause in an argument that she could retreat to when defeated.

Gilbert was glad when the excitement of electioneering entered into her and evicted all other thoughts from her mind.

The Radical candidate had the advantages of being the son of a popular character in Warnford, and of having the services of an ingenious and quite unscrupulous agent. This agent accomplished the initial feat of annoying his opponent; and a flurried, irritated candidate standing for the first time is apt to lose points in the contest. Lawrence Ackroyd, who had come down to coach his brother-in-law, found him difficult to manage: he had not the art of answering unexpected and unanswerable questions gracefully, and the other side had mastered the science of putting them in diverting ways at disconcerting moments. There were certain wards where his hold, always slight, grew less; in the brick-fields by the marshes; in Warnford itself among the hands at the oil-cake mills down by the river-side. Dalliac's agent, a conscientious young enthusiast, came to Lawrence Ackroyd in despair.

"It's no use, sir! The guv'nor means well, but he is not on the spot. What's the use of his talking Education Bills to electors that don't *want* their kids to be kept at school? Or Disestablishment of the

Church to river-side loafers who go ratting regularly every Sunday morning ? ”

“ If we could afford to take the point of view that the education of the electorate is desirable, there is a good deal to be said,” replied Lawrence Ackroyd. “ But we don’t want to lose a safe seat. What do you advise ? ”

“ Keep the gov’nor out of it now, sir, and let the ladies canvass,” came with candour and promptness, and Lawrence Ackroyd paid the earnest young man the compliment of taking his advice. Juliet and Anne, who had hitherto driven to political meetings in a beribboned carriage to decorate the platform in village schools and parish rooms by their presence, were now given canvassing cards and a free hand in the most truculent centres of uncertainty. Juliet canvassed nervously, strenuously, and conscientiously ; Anne joyously, with the eagerness of a child for a new game, and with as much keenness as if her life and future happiness depended upon the result of her every day’s work. There was a rumour that one dour Radical miller resisted all her pretty coaxing, and vowed he’d vote blue as his father had before him, until Anne’s lips trembled, her eyes brimmed with tears, when the embarrassed miller hurriedly said, “ There, there, Missy, don’t you fret, I’ll change my colour this time.”

She returned every day triumphant, to the amusement of the entire house party. Gilbert and Lawrence Ackroyd had coached her carefully on the general lines of the issues of the election, but, as far as they could make out, her methods did not involve much political controversy. An elector obstinate enough to argue with her was an exceptional phenomenon in

her experience. Once she casually mentioned that she had wasted twenty minutes talking about Tariff Reform to a sweep in a mews.

"I told him what a lot of good it would do to the trade of the country," she said, "and then he asked if it was going to do all everybody said it was, how long would it take to get it all fixed up and in working order? I said about a fortnight."

A shout of laughter greeted this forecast when they realised that she had spoken in all good faith. Lawrence Ackroyd remarked, "The other side can hardly match that." And Gilbert said, "I think I'd better put an advertisement in the Personal Column of *The Times* to declare that I won't be responsible for my wife's statements."

But Anne won the election. William Dalliac was returned with a majority of eighty votes, and was sincerely grateful to his pretty guest. So was Juliet; and when Parliament opened in February and the Dalliacs came up to London to their house in Brooke Street for the session, they tried to repay their debt by endless kindnesses to the younger people. Lawrence Ackroyd contrived to put work in Gilbert's way. Juliet Dalliac invited Anne to all her parties, and introduced her to all her friends.

Gilbert explained that it was good for his professional career if they accepted every invitation, and discovered that Anne had developed a new interest in his work which he did nothing to encourage. He suspected that she was secretly ambitious for him to make sufficient money to enable them to live at Crane Hall. He had no desire to live in the country, and a strong conviction that, however hard he worked, he would never rise to the lucrative rungs of

the ladder of the Law. He was not anxious for Anne to know much about his professional affairs. He was not a very successful barrister, and she was acute enough to discover this if he gave her the chance. She was impatient, quick, intolerant, ruthless, clear-eyed; she would be disappointed in him, would probably despise him, and he wasn't going to be despised by a dear little, silly, clever child like Anne. He preferred that she should regard him as a mysteriously busy man, and he fostered this idea by allowing her to imagine he had work when he frequently had not. He didn't lie to her, but he didn't take her into his confidence. And Anne had plenty of other interests. She led a gay life, and spent a good deal of money on her clothes.

Francesca thought she was becoming frivolous and extravagant: she did not say so, but Anne discerned the unuttered disapproval and avoided her as much as possible.

Once Francesca, not having seen her sister-in-law for three months, and being hurt and disappointed because Anne had wired a flimsy excuse for not lunching with her, went to Chelsea for the deliberate purpose of reproaching her. She went at an hour when she knew Anne would be at home. The maid said "Mrs. Trevor was dressing for dinner, but wouldn't be long, and Master Phil was in his bath, if she would like to wait in the nursery." The small boy and his aunt were cordial friends, and her ruffled feelings were partially appeased by his imperious request to be washed by "F'ancesca": he adopted his parents' title for people, nobody could make him say "aunt," and Francesca didn't try to.

Phil, clean and warm and sleepy, with his little

hard head with its damp curls nestled against her shoulder, was a soothing presence. She laid her cheek on his head, and forbore to hurry him over his supper. He prolonged the repast by nibbling his milk biscuits into fantastic shapes and chattering to them.

"Now I've made a bear! Poor old bear, shall I bite off your head? No, I'm not a cruel boy. I'll bite you into a duck. There! dear little duck! F'ancesca, are there bears in Heaven?"

"Master Phil saw bears at the Zoo and is afraid of them," said the nurse, who was hovering in and out of the nursery.

"If there are bears in Heaven I won't go there," he replied to his own question.

"No, darling, of course there are no bears in Heaven."

"Ven what is it vat growls up in the sky in a fun-derstorm?" he asked.

"Only the thunder, darling."

"I fink it is bears. Is God up vere all ve time?"

"Yes," reassuringly, "all the time."

"Poor old God!" said Phil slowly and devoutly.

Just then Anne came into the nursery. She was dressed in a new frock, all blue chiffon and silver sequins, in which she looked prettier than Francesca had ever seen her. Phil gave a little squeal of admiration, and Francesca felt a throb of æsthetic pleasure. She, Francesca, had spent the afternoon at a suffrage meeting. The speakers had been eloquent but dowdily dressed; the audience, working women with apathetic, harassed faces and dirty, shabby, ugly clothes. The room had been hideous, hot and ill-

ventilated; the speeches had been depressing, all about the grievances of the women workers in the sweated industries. The hateful, suffocating, indescribable smell of utter poverty had been in the hall itself, and the meeting hadn't been a good one: a sneering, common man with a foreign name and a Cockney accent had been sent by the anti-suffragists to interrupt, and he had done so with cheap, coarse jokes, at which some of the pitiful women in the audience had laughed. Francesca had come away sick at heart and discouraged, with her nerves all ajar, and with her grievance against Anne hot and sore. All the way to Chelsea she had rehearsed in her mind how she would word the reproof the child had so assuredly deserved, and now she found herself involuntarily smiling in pure relief at the blue and silver picture of joyousness.

"Mummy, you are beautiful to-night!" Phil exclaimed, putting his arms round her neck and hugging her ecstatically as she knelt on the bath-rug.

"Phil, you're putting biscuit crumbs all down my neck! They are so prickly and uncomfortable. Let me go, darling, I want to talk to Francesca." She gave him to his nurse to be carried to bed, and sat down on the floor at Francesca's feet, with her hands round her knees, her own pretty silver shoes and stockings making Francesca's black boots look large and dusty.

Anne was feeling a little guilty about her behaviour, and was resolved to be very charming to atone for past delinquencies. She talked about Gilbert and Phil, and was confiding and affectionate and amusing. Francesca deliberately allowed herself to be beguiled; Anne wiles were as transparent as Phil's, but no

human woman could scold anything so Titania-like. After all, argued Francesca, the child was a very good wife and mother—she would pass through this spoilt-child phase. In Anne's absence Francesca saw her faults very clearly, in her presence she only saw her grace and charm and child-like ingenuousness which appealed to all Francesca's maternal instincts. She felt a motherly desire to improve her, to correct her ; she wanted her to be perfectly good as well as delightfully pretty : but she was afraid of losing her affection.

Francesca gradually felt at peace with the world again ; it might be ugly and awry, but it still held compensations in the form of such satisfyingly pretty creatures as Phil and Anne. She suddenly stooped and kissed Anne, and Anne flushed and clung to her for a moment, and held up her lips to be kissed again. Anne felt forgiven, and Francesca felt reconciled, though no words of reproof or remorse had been spoken.

They drove away from Chelsea together. Anne was dining with Lawrence Ackroyd at the House, and Francesca was dining at her Club. She asked where Gilbert was.

" Oh, he's dining with the Blakes."

" Didn't they invite you ? "

" Yes, I suppose so, but I wouldn't go. I can't stand Laura Blake, she bores me, and I hate all their friends. And Mr. Ackroyd is taking me to see the ballet at the Palace."

Francesca supposed it was a sensible new custom for husbands and wives to make separate dinner engagements. She felt she had fallen out of London social ways. It occurred to her that it was unwise of

Gilbert to allow anyone so young and pretty as Anne to dine out alone with other men ; but it did not pass through her mind that there was any harm in Gilbert going alone to the Blakes.

CHAPTER IX

THE Blakes had once been comparatively poor. That is to say, they had lived through a time in West Kensington when they had only been able to keep two servants, and when paying their debts had been one of the many desirable extravagances they could not afford. But Charles Blake, who possessed neither perseverance, nor patience, nor any of the particular virtues which would have brought him happiness in his circumstances, and had a restless mind, a discontented wife, and expensive tastes, three ever present goads to spur his dissatisfaction out of the unsuccessful groove of the law in which his father had established him, tried various expedients for augmenting his income by short cuts which unaccountably led to the diminishment of his capital. And then one day a black man walked into his office. Nelson Wellington was the name printed on the visiting card he presented. He was a full-blooded negro from the West Coast of Africa, and he was in dire need of legal assistance. He was being prosecuted, he said unjustly, on account of a little mistake that had arisen over his "business affair."

His "business affair," when he was induced to divulge it, had the single merit of simplicity. He was engaged in promoting a company for obtaining mahogany from virgin forests in Central Africa.

He, Nelson Wellington, claimed to be the son of a native chieftain with special rights and concessions in the country. There was a fortune in such a timber trade he averred, and he was in London to raise sufficient money to finance it. He had portfolios of plans and large scale maps, documents, and photographs, and he was succeeding admirably in his enterprise when ill-luck confronted him in the person of a District Political Commissioner home on leave. This official happened to be related by marriage to the young and guileless capitalist who had consented to become a Director of the Karno Fellussi Mahogany Timber Company, and who had already invested five thousand pounds in it, or imagined he had. His kinsman, Captain Anstruther, hearing of the company, had taken a prompt and keen interest in it; so prompt and so keen that Nelson Wellington was in the predicament that brought him in great distress into the first solicitor's office he had happened to find.

For Captain Anstruther, who knew the district, stated that while the mahogany trees undoubtedly existed, the means for getting them to the coast did not, there was neither rail nor river; and that the cost of transporting the logs would be considerably more than the price the mahogany would fetch in the market. Furthermore, when the incredulous Director of the Company produced the photographs of the gangs of labourers already engaged in the lucrative timber trade, Captain Anstruther only stopped laughing to curse "the black nigger's black insolence." For the photographs, genuine enough, were but genuine photographs of labourers engaged in constructing a new Government light railway

several hundred miles away from the forest where the mahogany trees flourished undisturbed. Captain Anstruther recognised the foreman in the foreground, who had once been a sergeant in his Haussa regiment. Moreover, he expressed a wish to meet Nelson Wellington, whom he suspected of being concerned in another matter that interested him officially—a little poisoning affair. Nelson Wellington almost wept as he explained what an unmerited aspersion this libel cast upon his character : he had never poisoned any human being, man or woman, nor even child. He omitted to state that Captain Anstruther's accusation referred to horses ; and he was not in the least anxious that a meeting between them should be arranged. He did not even seem anxious to clear his splendid name. He explained that his father was ill, and he feared that judicial proceedings might delay his return to West Africa. Charles Blake feared so too. His black client amused him ; he was such an ingenious scoundrel, and his plan had so nearly succeeded. The whole thing appealed to Blake's robust sense of humour. There was some technical delay over initiating legal proceedings. Captain Anstruther wanted him indicted on some other charge than that of obtaining money on false pretences ; the youthful Director hesitated about appearing in the public eye as a fool, and he wanted his money back ; and while his prosecutors were hesitating, Charles Blake gave his client the soundest advice he had ever given anybody—to catch the next Elder Dempster boat at Liverpool and return to the land of his forefathers.

The man had been so scared, and was so relieved at finding himself free to escape, that he was propor-

tionately grateful; for he attributed this freedom to some mysterious and ulterior machinations of his legal adviser. His gratitude he expressed in flowery language in a letter he wrote from Lagos when he landed. The epistle concluded :

“ And now my ever blessed sir, if you ever want the filthy lucre which it has not been my regarded privilege to award to you in return for your esteemed services rendered, I would adjure you that though the mahogany wood has been so sorrowful a failure owing to circumstances over which I have no control, yet there is a hellish lot of money to be made out of the rubber trees in that same place, for it is easier to carry rubber through the Bush than to bear mahogany logs.”

This seemed such a self-evident proposition to Charles Blake that he wondered why the rascal hadn't made that his original object, until the thought struck him that the man had wanted to raise the capital to work the rubber for his own benefit without giving valuable information away to his dupes, and that the mahogany had been a red herring. Charles Blake decided that the advice might be sound, and that if he was going to be made a bankrupt it might as well be for a large sum. He thought his wife would bear the misfortune better if he failed for a dignified amount of money. So with the remains of his own capital, all his wife's money, and all the money he could borrow, and some of his clients', he went out to Lagos, and did not return for five months. Afterwards he sometimes referred airily to his “ little holiday when he went to Madeira on the way home,” but he never vouchsafed a more

detailed account of how he passed the time. But he came home with a little more emphasis in his genial bluff manners, and promoted the West African Illallah Rubber Company, which was the first of a successful series of similar financial enterprises.

There are diverse ways in which promoters of companies can make money : it was believed that Charles Blake discreetly tried them all. At any rate he did make a great deal of money in a very short time. Then he left off promoting companies and became a Director of several that had survived their rickety infancy. He invested capital in industrial companies in the Midlands, endowed a hospital, and took an interest in politics by subscribing to party funds and twice contesting a perfectly hopeless seat. For these public services he was rewarded with a knighthood ; and his father, who had watched his career with apprehension, repented of his distrust, and died happily in the erroneous belief that the Government of the country knew his son better than he did.

Laura Blake, translated first from the western limits of West Kensington to Campden Hill and thence to Grosvenor Street, still remained discontented.

Charles Blake was not artistic. He admired his wife and was proud of her voice, but he liked her to dress in fashionably cut clothes and to sing " Caller' Herring." He was puzzled by her preference for flowing draperies, generally in dull shades of purple or blue, and bored by her cultivation of modern German music. She shuddered at his gifts of horse-shoe diamond brooches, and smiled in a superior way when he complained that the music she and her friends raved about had no good tunes in it, and that

wrong notes would sound just as right as the right notes. He learnt to give in to her whims good humouredly, saying, "If a woman can't have her own way in her own house where is she to have it?"—and finding his own pleasure and indulging his own tastes in other ways. As they became rich he grew stout and prosperous-looking; she admired thin men who looked ascetic and aristocratic. And she admired Gilbert Trevor exceedingly. They had first met before his marriage, and he had attracted her. Charles Blake was then beginning to make money and they had just moved to Campden Hill. She liked everything about him, his profession—a barrister was more refined than a company-promoting solicitor—his good looks, and his rather proud reserved manners. Charles' bluff heartiness got on her nerves. Gilbert was interested in music too. It was part of Charles Blake's trade to entertain lavishly and Laura was a clever hostess. Gilbert accepted a good deal of hospitality from them, and being a bachelor was not expected to return it. She managed to see a good deal of him in those days, and it was a severe disappointment to her when he married. She was relieved to find his wife so young and unformed and insignificant. She felt he had thrown himself away, and that somehow constituted a triumph, or the promise of a triumph, for her. After the first formal courtesies she and Anne avoided each other's society. But as Lady Blake, with a large house in Grosvenor Street and a box at the Opera, she renewed her friendship with Gilbert. He admired her; she was elegant, graceful in a languid statuesque way. He pitied her; she was fastidious and intellectual and her husband was a bounder. She deliberately exerted

herself to fascinate him. It provoked her to find that he was quite safely in love with his wife, for she had decided that his wife was unworthy of him. Once or twice she let him see that she considered he had thrown himself away, so cleverly and subtly that he could not have resented or challenged it without appearing to be a conceited coxcomb. He was flattered by her preference and admiration ; he found her sympathetic. Anne never flattered him, nor was Anne quite so systematically sympathetic ; she was too young and candid. Gradually and unconsciously he came to category Anne as " a dear little girl," Laura Blake as " a charming woman."

There was another reason why he deliberately saw a good deal of the Blakes. Sir Charles Blake seemed to have a genius for making money, and Gilbert sometimes thought of asking him for financial advice ; for Anne, either in spite of, or because of, her penurious youth, was taking to extravagance as a wild deer to the mountains. He hesitated about doing this. He had heard rumours that all the ways in which Blake had made his money were not creditable, and he did not wish to be concerned in shady business transactions ; he just held the idea before himself as a possibility that was always open to him.

Juliet Dalliac sometimes teased Anne about Gilbert's growing intimacy with the Blakes. Anne laughed ; it was so like Juliet ! Juliet was so good-tempered, kind, and simple, incapable of malice or mischief, looking at everything with round, dark, short-sighted eyes that saw everything in crude colours and straight lines. Her brother, who was devoted to her, once said she had a thoroughly

commonplace mind : and she had good-humouredly retorted, that in a thoroughly commonplace world it was the most useful kind of mind to possess. She had all the domestic virtues, was an excellent house-keeper, an affectionate wife, and a sensible mother ; her three little girls were model children who looked up to Phil Trevor with the unreciprocated awe and respect that is the tribute of admiration good children invariably and perversely pay to naughty ones. She was a happy wife and an unselfish friend, and had a normal, sane outlook upon life, literature, and art. Anyone who deviated from the simple unimaginative limits of her vision she diagnosed as mad. She had three classifications for such persons and things—"rather mad," "quite mad," and "a bit too mad." Most of the people she liked and understood were "rather mad" : everybody she liked but didn't understand was "quite mad," and the people she neither liked nor understood were dismissed as "a bit too mad." The people she considered sane were negligibly few. She applied the same standard to books and pictures and music.

She loved Anne but thought her quite mad. Laura Blake she knew and considered a "bit too mad." John Halliday she met at Chelsea and found rather mad, but she liked him and invited him to dinner. He was unable to accept the invitation because his evening clothes were worn into holes, and, at the moment, he could not afford a new suit, having exhausted his credit at his tailor's. He told her this quite simply, and as it always distressed her that anyone she knew should be really poor, she tried to befriend him. After consulting her brother, she tried to persuade her husband to find him work.

"You know you do need somebody to read Blue Books and write your speeches for you. You can't really look after your business and be a good Member of Parliament unless you're helped, and that nice Mr. Halliday would be such a comfort."

"How do you know?"

"He's got such a nice kind face; and Anne says he's awfully clever, and writes so well."

"But how do you know he'd care about being my secretary? Seems to me it would be a dog's life."

"You can but ask him," said Juliet. "Do it tactfully."

So John was invited to lunch one Sunday. And William Dalliack, when they were smoking in his library afterwards, scattered cigar ash over a pile of papers on his writing-table, and said:

"I'm finding this rather too much of a good thing. Can't neglect business, yet if I don't half a hundred things don't get done."

"You need a secretary," said John innocently.

"That's the difficulty. I've tried one, as nice a red-haired girl as ever wore spectacles; but she didn't work."

"Not much good if she wouldn't work," agreed John.

"I don't mean she didn't *work*," explained the harassed M.P. "Most conscientious girl she was! I meant it didn't answer. She did what I told her to before I had time to stop her. It is a tricky thing a secretary. I don't want someone to be polite for me. I can be polite myself if necessary. I want someone to damn my clerk-of-the-work's eyes when he rings me up with a lot of silly unnecessary messages when I'm busy."

"You want a man," hazarded John.

"Yes, and one that can squeeze the juice out of a Blue Book and boil it down on a postcard for me. Are you interested in politics yourself?"

"I'm a writer," said John. "And I live in the Euston Road. I'm interested in the world and I'd be interested in politics if I could see any sense come out of all the talking. You know it is a queer neighbourhood where I live. It is noisy and dirty. Sometimes when I sit writing about imaginary people in imaginary places and I hear a row outside, a fight perhaps, and children shrieking, and drunken men and women shouting, I want to leave my story and go down and interfere. If I did I should probably get run in. Now Parliament has the power to interfere without getting into trouble with the police; it seems to me it misses its opportunity."

"There's a good deal of useful legislation put through."

"I don't know that the people I'm talking about want legislation."

"What do they want then?"

"Most of 'em want washing."

"You're not suggesting Members of Parliament should set out and wash them, are you?"

"I don't know! It would be rather a lark! Put 'em on flannel aprons, and give 'em a sponge and towel and a cake of soap, and set them to bathing all the kids that need it—I bet you we'd have a darned sight more sensible House of Commons at the end of a week!"

William Dalliac stared at John with awakening perplexity.

"You're not a Socialist, are you?"

"Rather not ! I've read all those Socialist chaps have got to say, and very brainy some of them are ; awfully plausible till they get together and stand on the table trying to break each other's heads with the chairs. But you know they all leave women out of their calculations. That's what puts them so hopelessly wrong."

"Most of them are feminists—votes for women and all that sort of thing—aren't they ?"

"That's where they're such egregious blighters !" explained John affably. "I'm a suffragist myself, and so is any man that isn't a cad ; but any political system that card-indexes women as 'feminists,' and thinks it has settled everything is fundamentally rotten. Why won't men knuckle down to a Socialist state and share out equally ? Because they don't want to ! And why don't they want to ? Because of the women ! It isn't crass selfishness that's at the bottom of the inequalities, or unfairness. Women aren't selfish, and men may be selfish as individuals, but they're not selfish as a race. Anyway it isn't selfishness that makes them work, and fight to keep what they've got and get a bit more."

"What do you make it out to be then ?"

"Love," said John stoutly. "That's why you can't alter it. A man wants the woman he loves to have every blessed thing she can think of, and it's because women can think of such a lot of queer things to want that they're so interesting. Look at their clothes and their furniture ! A man is content with a leather arm-chair. A woman, when she's got an arm-chair, wants three pink cushions too, to put in it, with tassels at the corners and things embroidered all over them. And a man who'd share

his dinner with a hungry tramp, will fight and shed blood to keep the right and the power to give his wife pink silk cushions if he's reached that stage of civilisation. And quite right too ! ”

John gave a friendly thump to the cushion on the sofa.

“ Aren't you cutting across the political economists ? ”

“ Political economists don't know anything. Whatever they say is always wrong, only they're cunning enough not to be found out. What they do is to invent a lot of laws that aren't laws at all but just phenomena. Then they write a book, and put in a lot of statistics to prove their argument, and make a lot of prophecies ; and when these don't come true, they say it is because people don't know what is good for them, or some such excuse. I've read lots of their books and they give me the hump.”

“ I don't mind admitting that they give me the hump too.”

“ And why is it ? ”

“ I've never quite decided.”

“ I'll tell you : it is because they leave everything that matters out of their calculations. Of course the things that matter, man's faith and hope and his love, aren't calculable so they can't help it even if they wanted to, which apparently they don't. It isn't their fault, only they shouldn't make a science of it. Mathematicians can make a science out of their material because they always know exactly how a conic section will behave : but if the directrix of a parabola, instead of going on to infinity, suddenly turned round and said, ‘ I've had enough of this, I'm going home ! ’ where'd they be ? In the lunatic

asylums, where most of the political economists ought to be."

"Aren't you rather hard on them?" The younger man's vehemence was amusing William Dalliac.

"No, because they do a lot of harm. Their rules would only work if man was a selfish machine. The secret of progress is man's inherent tendency to act against his own material interests. If men were as selfish as their rules of the game assume them to be the world would get on according to their axioms, and things would right themselves. There'd be no poverty, and everyone would be as smug and self-satisfied as they'd like 'em to be, and the race would either be extinct or have evolved into monkeys. But it is men's altruism that is always getting in the way."

William Dalliac surveyed his guest meditatively. Then he said: "Do you find your profession a lucrative one, if it isn't an impertinent question?"

"Not particularly. No one wants to buy what I want to write."

Half an hour later William Dalliac sought his wife and, with the complacent smile of a man who has contrived to do a meritorious action and advance his own interests at the same time, he told her that he'd engaged John Halliday as his secretary.

"He's a nice lad. Thinks people aren't selfish, and that three pounds a week is a large income. He'll save me a lot of worry."

John walked home slowly with rather a troubled expression in his eyes. He had accepted the offered post wholly because he thought it would keep him in touch with Anne. He had found it difficult to see much of her lately. As a daily inmate of the house

of her great friends he would see her more often and hear of her continually. His hungry heart would be fed, but his work would have to be laid aside, and he could not renounce it lightly. He tried to rejoice over his landlady's good fortune in getting his rent assured regularly for some time to come, but that was irrelevant comfort. He spent the evening poring over a half-finished story, scratching out redundant words, altering phrases, gloating over happy expressions. At moments he was tempted to think of writing to decline the work he had been offered, but then came the thought, what was the use even of success to him if in pursuing his aim he drifted away from Anne? He needed Anne in his life more than he wanted fame. She was living in a different world at present, one far removed from his dingy, struggling, shabby world. The world he had been lunching in, with its luxury, its fantastically delicate food and wine in a romantic setting of silver and flowers was the proper world for Anne, but his only chance of meeting her in it seemed to be the chance he had been offered. He had seized it impulsively. The one illusion he would not be parted from was a hazy idea that in some way he was, or would be, necessary to Anne. He cherished a vague feeling that nothing harmful could happen to her while he was watching over her even from a distance.

CHAPTER X

THE "Dalliac Press" offices were in St. Martin's Lane; the printing works were in Camden Town; and the Dalliac's house was in Brooke Street. John found his time fairly evenly divided between these three places and Westminster. His work was varied; he read Blue Books and White Papers and made copious notes from which he framed speeches that were intended to enliven proceedings in the House of Commons—only William Dalliac never delivered them. He was quite pleased to go down to the House with typewritten speeches in his pocket, and no intention in his mind of catching the Speaker's eye. He would glance through the pages, chuckle over John's candid expression of opinion, and use some of his most striking expressions in conversations in the lobby or smoking-room; but John scanned Hansard in vain for his winged words of wisdom, and began to have a poor opinion of the Speaker's sense of justice. At the St. Martin's Lane office he set himself to understand estimates and contracts, and to learn the ways of paper manufacturers and advertising agents; but when he could escape to the works at Camden Town he was really happiest. He appropriated a small bare room with two large windows looking into a quadrangular paved courtyard; the linoleum had all the pattern worn off and

was stained with spots of red and black ink, the distempered walls were faded and cracked, the furniture was ill-matched, worn and scanty, and the only ornament was a decorative calendar. At Camden Town the manager of the works was a middle-aged Scotsman, recently promoted from the management of the Edinburgh branch. He was a clever, energetic, bad-tempered man, short and broad-shouldered with a square red face and stiff red hair and moustache, and small twinkling blue eyes. His name was Duncan Campbell. John suspected him of drinking, and loathed the rough, overbearing way he spoke to the men. But he was competent. He had, moreover, that intelligent respect for education that distinguishes the working-classes of Scotland from their English brethren south of the Border. An Englishman of his type, class, and temperament would probably have resented John's presence at the works, and made it difficult or unpleasant for him to maintain any position of authority : for John was younger, wholly ignorant of the technical mysteries of the printing craft, and full of his own ideas as to what looked well in type. In spite of these three reasons, which might have tempted another man to discomfort and disconcert him, Campbell not only treated him with respect but with laborious and ponderous amiability. The manager knew everything there was to be known about inks, papers, and linotype and monotype machines ; he could estimate time and costs more quickly and more accurately than any other printer in London ; but he was not so familiar with the hand-presses used for the casual jobs, and he lacked knowledge of the finer grades of printing as an art. He knew his trade by rule of

thumb. On John's first visit to the office the rough proof of a double-crown poster was on the table being corrected. John glanced at it with a critical eye.

"Good bold type this," said Campbell, who was showing John over the works with the airs of a proprietor.

"A bit heavy for my taste," said John.

"It's an advertisement, sir. Got to have something striking that will be seen on the hoardings," explained the manager patronisingly.

"It will be seen all right," remarked John. "But unless you're straight in front of it it will be mighty difficult to read it."

Campbell stopped and looked quickly from the poster to John and back again.

"They've crowded it a bit," he said doubtfully.

"It is those fat letters," continued John innocently. "If they were thinner it would show up at twice the distance at any angle."

The man had a swift inward debate: whether to admit that John was right, that an untrained eye had judged more truly than his own, or whether to assert his own experience and sweep John's criticism aside with a heavy hand of authority. There was only one thing he valued more than his own reputation for infallibility, and that was the reputation of the firm: the two were bound up together in his own mind. No other firm could compete with his firm for swift, accurate, cheap wholesale work: but other London firms could and did beat his when it came to jobbing, occasional orders. There were profits to be made in such orders, and the London works existed partly for the sake of that particular branch of the

trade. He aimed at capturing the casual fish that went at present into other nets. It occurred to him that John, being a man of education, might be able to bring an artistic taste to bear on matters where his own views were of doubtful value. He decided to be respectful. He had the poster reset in lighter type, and admitted that John had been right. After that experience he took pains over John's initiation into the technical mysteries of the craft, brought proofs to him for his advice, deferred to his opinion, even when John suggested drastic alterations. And John spent his spare afternoons in the North Library at the British Museum studying the productions of William Morris, and other fine examples of modern printing, and his spare moments in trying to persuade William Dalliac to order new founts of type, and Duncan Campbell and the compositors into scrapping every finial and initial ornament in the works. William Dalliac was pleased at his enthusiasm, but only amused at the fascination exercised by the printing works : nobody understood or sympathised with that but Duncan Campbell, who encouraged it. Briefly, his view was that the more time and attention given to the firm by persons of intelligence the better, and John Halliday was a person of intelligence within the meaning of the words : persons of unintelligence were the large class of beings who were not interested in printing and whose opinion would be of no value if they had been. There were people in the world to whom "serifs," "quads," "quoins" and "mortices" were unknown terms ; Campbell was glad to think of them as being safely outside the works, and likely to remain there : "bletherring eediot's" he called them.

John invited Anne to come and be shown over the works ; but she first postponed and then evaded the expedition. She was disappointed that he should have chosen to be interested in printing other people's books rather than in writing them himself ; she felt he had descended a rung or two in the intellectual ladder. Her interest in his affairs was precious to John and any manifestation of it welcome.

He said to her : " One day I shall finish my book, in the meantime other things are jolly interesting."

" But they are other people's things, not yours."

" That doesn't make them less interesting."

" You don't understand what I mean," she replied.

" I think it is very silly of you to waste your time."

" I'm not wasting my time," he protested.

" Yes you are," she said angrily. " You're much too good to be spending your time in those horrid printing works."

" Printing is awfully important—you've no idea what a difference a beautiful type makes," he pleaded ; but Anne was annoyed and ready to quarrel with him, so, rather wistfully, he changed the conversation.

He reflected that the advantage of seeing Anne more frequently which he had gained by his change of occupation passed over her head. He gloated over it in secret. She was growing prettier, he thought, and was evidently having a good time. Gilbert must be making a lot of money, was another idea that gave him satisfaction, for Anne was beautifully dressed.

Gilbert, as a matter of fact, was not making a lot of money ; and it was a fact that was beginning to

disturb him, for William Dalliac was, and had notified him that he was looking for a larger country house, and would not renew his tenancy of Crane Hall when his seven years' lease expired. Anne took the news quite cheerfully and suggested that when a new tenant was found the rent might be raised. He pointed out, with some irritation, that the place might be empty for years, and that in any case his agents reported that the roof was in bad order and would have to be repaired.

"I don't know how I'm going to find the money," he grumbled.

They were in Phil's nursery, playing with an elaborate engine that Lawrence Ackroyd had given him. Phil, forbidden to carry out his own method of deriving amusement from it, his own method being to turn it upside down and hammer its internal machinery with a brick, took no interest in it. He retreated to the window-seat with his fur monkey and whispered stories in its ear, ostentatiously ignoring his mother and father on the floor who were making the engine perform its natural orthodox functions for his benefit.

"Can't we economise by living there ourselves?" said Anne. "Then we shouldn't have to pay rent here."

"And what about my work, you little goose?"

"I forgot that. Don't overwind it, Gilbert."

"Besides, anyway I can't afford to keep it up. I'm not overwinding it. Mind your hand!"

"I suppose we must economise over holidays this year," said Anne, rather ruefully. "Let's not go abroad. The Dalliacs have asked us to spend Easter with them. Let's go there instead of to Paris. And

let's go to Francesca in the summer. She wants us, and—Oh ! It has hurt me ! ” The machinery of the toy, starting suddenly, had pinched her hand which was holding it unscientifically.

“ I told you to be careful—let's see the damage.” He took Anne's finger out of her mouth and examined the cut. “ It isn't much—what a baby you are ! Here, I'll tie it up. What silly little soft hands ! They don't feel as if they've got any bones in them.”

He tore a strip off his handkerchief and made a bandage, and while he bent over her hand, binding it with gentleness and skill, he said :

“ Perhaps it would be as well to give up Paris. We always spend far too much money, and you're quite happy at the Dalliacs. They're sure to have a house full. . . . That isn't too tight ? . . . As a matter of fact, the Blakes have asked me to go up to them in Scotland for some fishing. It would fit in rather well.”

“ What, instead of coming to Crane Hall ? ”

“ Yes. They've taken a shooting-lodge at Loch something, Strathspey.”

Some instinct in Anne that she could not fathom made her exclaim :

“ Oh no—I think that's a horrid idea. Do come to Crane Hall with me ! ”

“ Why is it a horrid idea ? How absurd you are ! Why shouldn't I go fishing ? ”

“ Because I want you to come to the Dalliacs.”

“ That is no reason.”

The finger was bandaged, her hand released ; she withdrew it, and he looked at her searchingly. He wondered whether she was going to fly into a temper :

she generally did if she really minded, and then he usually gave in. He would have given in now if she had coaxed him not to accept the invitation, or had flown into a rage. But she was too proud to plead any more. They were both silent for a moment. Phil's voice crooning to his beloved Jimmy, came from the window.

" . . . And so ve soldiers brought out ve elephant, and first vey painted it all over wif treacle, and ven vey painted it all over wif water, and ven vey painted it all over wif paint—d'you see, Jimmy ? "

Anne got up from the floor.

" I suppose Phil is included in the invitation ? " Gilbert asked.

" Of course."

Her voice was indifferent. Gilbert decided that she didn't mind enough to get angry : whereas she was angry, but was too proud to betray it. She had no real objection to Gilbert going to stay with the Blakes, but she was vexed with him for not giving way at once when she had asked him to stay with her ; while Gilbert saw no reason why he should give way to Anne but felt a little guilty about going to stay with the Blakes. Laura was beginning to make him feel self-conscious when he was with her—but only pleasantly self-conscious—conscious that he was a much more attractive man than Sir Charles Blake.

Neither he nor Anne referred to the subject again. They were both on their best behaviour and very kind to each other : Anne, because she thought Gilbert would probably alter his mind and accompany her to Norfolk ; Gilbert, because he had no intention of doing so. She only realised she and Phil were going alone at the last moment ; and it was rather

a sullen little face she put up to be kissed when Gilbert saw them off at St. Pancras ; but Phil was happy, and so vociferous and excited that her silent displeasure was not conspicuous. Phil seemed to consider that the authority of his nurse lapsed in places like railway stations which were ruled over by superior beings in uniforms. Anne never could manage him, and Gilbert, preventing him by physical force from diving down between the train and the platform to watch the axles of the wheels being greased, and from climbing up to pull the communication cord with the aspiration of starting the train prematurely, and from escaping altogether in the direction of the engine to strike up an acquaintance with the driver, had neither eyes nor ears nor leisure to perceive that Anne was sulking. He kissed her with precisely the same mixture of affection and distraction and haste with which he kissed Phil and his last words were : " Take care of them both, Nurse," as he shut them in their carriage and walked away.

Anne's annoyance had missed fire. She decided to impress it upon Gilbert by not writing to him, and was disconcerted when he blunted the effect of this treatment by not writing to her : he sent her his love on picture postcards addressed to Phil, and messages to say he had no news. As she couldn't work off her displeasure on Gilbert she punished John, who was her fellow-guest at the Dalliacs for the Easter holidays. She couldn't quarrel with him, for he only looked worried and distressed when she tried to ; but she tormented him by professing the most outrageous sentiments upon whatever subject came up for discussion. She began at breakfast.

"It is a wet day," Juliet observed. "What shall we do?"

"Let's shock John," suggested Anne, with a little blue flame of impishness in her eyes; and she proceeded to do it. She knew exactly what opinions and affectations he hated most, and without actually hurting his feelings, she managed to make him thoroughly unhappy. Then she realised that she was quite spoiling his short holiday and relented, and made amends by being very sympathetic. She let him show her his two new treasures, two examples of fine printing, one from the Doves Press, and a copy of the *Minor Poems of Milton* from the Ashendene Press, and trebled his pleasure in them by sharing it.

"Why do people make ugly things when it is just as easy to make beautiful things?" she wondered.

"I don't think it is just as easy," he demurred. "You might just as well say, why do people do or say stupid or unkind things when it is just as easy to do or say wise and good things."

"It isn't a bit the same," she argued.

"Yes it is. To get, or take, a right line means knowledge and trouble and pains, and that means sacrificing time and thought and oneself—whether your line is physical or mental or moral."

"We're talking about beauty. Morals and beauty have nothing to do with each other. Lots of very moral people think beautiful things rather wrong, they think it wrong to sacrifice time and thought to them."

"That's because only one part of them is moral. And when artists who create beautiful things are immoral, it's their limitations that's the matter, it's

because only part of them cares for beauty—not that morality isn't good enough for them, which is the way some of them talk."

The two fair heads pored over the printed pages. Anne's loose pale gold hair touched John's rough brown curls, and their hostess smiled at their absorption in the book she considered uninteresting. She was embroidering a pinafore for her youngest daughter, and was thankful that her guests had left off squabbling and were happy together.

John went back to London on the Tuesday after Easter, and Anne went to the station to see him off, and picked a bunch of white violets for him and pinned them in his buttonhole. Then she walked back across the fields. Juliet was busy with her domestic affairs and had stayed comfortably at home.

It was a cold windy day. A sharp east wind chased masses of clouds swiftly across a green-blue sky, and whistled through the still leafless hedges as if it were in a hurry to dry up the sodden wet fields. A faint soft green showed on the woods in the distance, like green smoke blowing through the trees, and here and there a wild cherry tree was in blossom, a lovely, lonely white thing. All the birds were busy nesting and singing, and primroses, pale yellow clusters of stars, grew in sheltered corners. Anne gathered a handful, and some branches of willow catkins growing by a stream, a stream she had to cross. She had been this way before with Gilbert, only then it had been September, and the stream had been a slow trickle of water almost asleep in its bed: now it was a swift brown brook swollen by the winter rains. The plank by which she had crossed before was either

submerged or swept away, there was only a narrow thin one, much higher on the bank. Anne did not like the bridge, the racing water below made her giddy. It was only about eight or nine feet to venture, but she was nervous. Twice she tried to step from the bank on to the swaying plank, and twice she drew back, furious with herself but not daring to go forward. The brook fed a river, a slow shallow trout stream which it joined a few yards away. The plank was the only means of getting across. On the river-bank where the streams met was a man fly-fishing. As Anne stood hesitating a cock pheasant started up, almost from under her feet, and took wing with a loud indignant shriek that startled her so she nearly fell into the stream. It startled the fisherman too. He turned round and saw Anne, an arresting little figure in a bright green frieze coat and skirt and hat, with her hands full of flowers. He divined her difficulty as she stood there looking helplessly at the plank, and laid down his rod.

"Wait a second," he called. "I'm coming."

He crossed the plank to her and held out his hand.

"Give me both yours, and don't look down at the water." As she still hesitated, he said: "Or shall I carry you across?"

"No, I'm coming," said Anne. He held her firmly and drew her slowly across the swaying bridge. His grasp gave her confidence.

"Thank you," she said when she was safely on the other side.

She walked a few steps from him, then resolutely turned round. "It is very silly of me. I'm going back again by myself."

"That you're not!" he declared emphatically, barring her way.

"Yes I am," she persisted. "I'm not going to be defeated by a mere plank."

"You're not," he said. "You're going to be defeated by a mere man. It would be extremely foolish to put a superfluous strain on your nerves for no reason. I won't countenance it. I'm a doctor."

"You're not *my* doctor," said Anne; as he did not move from her path she asked: "Why don't you go on with your fishing?"

"I've finished fishing. I'm going to escort you back to your mother."

"I haven't got a mother."

"I'm sorry. I was speaking figuratively. I'm going to take you safely back to whoever you do belong to."

"I belong to myself," said Anne with dignity. They eyed each other. He looked at her whimsically, with a twinkle in his rather sleepy grey eyes. He was not tall, only about half a head taller than Anne, and he stooped; their eyes were almost on a level. He was a man of about fifty, broad-shouldered and lean, dressed in a shabby tweed suit. Anne instinctively liked the tribute paid her by the expression of admiration in his eyes, and she liked his finely cut, thin, long-fingered hands. A fair moustache hid his mouth. They faced each other; he was resolute, she was defiant. Then, as she realised she could neither evade his determination nor stand there indefinitely quarrelling with a stranger, she capitulated and turned round.

"Very well," she said. "I'm going home. But I shall come this way to-morrow."

"Good," he said. "What time shall you come?"

"I didn't mean that," she smiled and coloured.
"As if I should tell you!"

"I spend most of the day fishing," he explained. He was walking beside her and she was wondering how to get rid of him and in no particular hurry to do so. In the absence of Gilbert, and John, and Lawrence Ackroyd, and everyone else, she did not object to starting a gentle evasive flirtation with the village doctor. It evidently amused and delighted him and it did not hurt her. He talked about fishing: he had travelled, caught salmon in Norway, mahseer in India, and tarpon in Florida. By the time they had reached the high road she was interested and friendly.

"My husband is fishing in Scotland," she said.

"And you're making for Crane Hall. Are you Mrs. Gilbert Trevor?"

"How did you guess?"

It seemed he was not the village doctor.

"I'm putting up at the inn in the village. My landlady waits on me, and she has a capacious interest in her fellow-men and a restless tongue. I not only know who is staying up at "the house," as she calls your place, but all about them, even what you have for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. So may I introduce myself? My name is Musgrave. Your tenant sublets the fishing to me. May I come and call one afternoon, do you suppose?"

Anne supposed he could. Before they parted at the gate, he had offered to teach her to cast a fly, and to lend her a book on fishing. Anne was always ready to be taught anything, and to read any book anybody recommended.

At lunch she informed Juliet that she had made friends with the fishing tenant.

"A Mr. Musgrave," she said. "He's coming to call and he's going to teach me fishing."

"You mean Sir Bradley Musgrave? He's the great surgeon you know." Juliet wrinkled up her forehead, she never frowned but she looked puzzled.

"He's rather mad, I believe."

"You don't mean he's insane?" enquired Anne.

"Oh no: but he is queer. William doesn't like him much."

In fact when William Dalliac arrived from a sojourn in Bath and found that his young guest was being taught fishing assiduously by the celebrated surgeon, he was annoyed, and fumed at Juliet.

"The man is very fast—a notorious bad lot. He isn't at all a fitting person for Anne to associate with. I don't like her fishing with him while she's under our roof. You must put a stop to it, Juliet."

Juliet looked frankly alarmed and doubtful.

"How?" she enquired. "You know how mad Anne is! And she's keen on it, the fishing I mean."

"Why doesn't her husband stay and look after her himself, instead of running after other men's wives?" he asked impatiently. "Any way, Juliet, you must tell her that there have been some very nasty scandals about him. He is unmarried, has a little house on the Chilterns, goes down there for week-ends, and there have been some very ugly stories. He thinks any pretty woman fair game. Anne is too young. He'll follow her up in London and get her talked about. You must warn her."

Very reluctantly Juliet broached the subject the next day, when the innkeeper's son brought up a

parcel of books "for Mrs. Treyor, with Sir Bradley Musgrave's compliments." Anne curled up on the dining-room window-seat, undecided which to devour first.

"Isn't it nice of him?" she asked, as pleased as a child with a parcel of new toys.

"You know, Anne dear, William doesn't like him," Juliet began.

"Well, then, I won't ask them to dinner to meet each other," said Anne amiably.

"Are you going to see more of him in London?"

"I suppose so," said Anne. "He's awfully interesting: he was telling me all about eels yesterday. Do you know that eels are the most extraordinary fish? They go down to the deep sea to breed and they never come back."

"Oh, nonsense Anne! I don't believe anything so mad. And William says he doesn't think you ought to be very nice to him."

"Why not? He's very nice to me. And it is true about eels."

Juliet stared at her, and then decided that Anne wasn't trying to change the conversation, but was genuinely interested in eels, incredible as it seemed.

"He really is a bit too mad, Anne. He has an awfully bad reputation."

"I thought he must be clever, he's got dozens of letters after his name—the whole alphabet."

"I don't mean his professional reputation, of course he's the cleverest scientist in London; I mean his morals."

"Oh I see," said Anne carelessly.

"There have been scandals," continued Juliet, rather embarrassed but obeying her husband.

“ You mean he’s been divorced ? ”

“ He isn’t married. Anne don’t be a baby, and don’t be obstinate. He isn’t at all a nice man, and I’m sure Gilbert won’t like you to make friends with him.”

“ I’m sure Gilbert won’t mind,” said Anne. “ He knows I can take care of myself.”

And at the happy thought that she might have found a new way of annoying Gilbert, she flirted with Sir Bradley Musgrave with zest until Lawrence Ackroyd came down and monopolised her himself. His method of managing Anne was successful. He didn’t criticise her new friend ; he merely made it quite clear that he wanted her time and attention himself, and bribed her to give him both by promising to teach her to drive his new motor-car. When it came to the point Anne didn’t like driving herself, so he motored her and Juliet all over the county. He never flirted with her, he bought her chocolates and paid her the compliment of taking her into his confidence. Somehow her somewhat childlike interest in everything unlocked his reserve. He admitted her into the inner sanctuary of his soul as he would have admitted a gentle child into a secret garden, a little afraid that she might innocently do some damage, but feeling repaid by the pleasure of her presence there.

The memories of their excursions in those windy, clear April days always remained with him as exquisite possessions. In after years, when he thought of spring he saw it incarnate in Anne ; everything else, the budding trees, the fields starred with constellations of daisies and dandelions, the knots of blossom on sunlit walls, crimson japonica,

pink peach, white plum blossom, the blue and white tangles of speedwell and daisies by the roadside, were only illuminated borders round pictures of Anne.

CHAPTER XI

ANNE was a little chagrined when she returned to London and to Gilbert and announced that she too had been fishing, to find that he raised no objection to her continuing her acquaintance with Sir Bradley Musgrave. She had made up her mind to resent his interference by way of asserting her independence, and was nonplussed when she found it remained unchallenged. However Gilbert had the most implicit confidence in the protective quality of her temper; moreover, he did not feel inclined to raise contentious subjects by criticising any friends she chose to make lest she should retaliate by pointing out that he was seeing a very great deal of Laura Blake. He was. He accounted for this to himself by reminding himself of the urgency of his need for making money, and of the hope that somehow Charles Blake might be useful. He frequented their house for the purpose of keeping in touch with his host with the intention of approaching the subject when a suitable opportunity came. And when his intention remained an intention instead of crystallising into a resolution he explained it to himself by his reluctance to be under an obligation to such a bounder as Charles Blake, his disapproval of speculative methods of making money, and his doubts of the impeccability of the financier's methods (those

fastidious scruples were genuine and he felt they were laudable). He really worried a good deal over the matter, and he persuaded himself that Anne ought to sympathise with him for worrying and respect him for keeping the fact from her. As she did not display any particular concern at the moment and took life as cheerfully as usual he felt she was ungrateful. He said to himself that Anne took everything as a matter of course. She certainly took everything pleasant as a matter of course. She skilfully evaded getting inveigled into any engagement that bored her, and accepted every invitation that amused her. It amused her to be taken out to lunch at the most fashionable hotels and restaurants by Sir Bradley Musgrave, for he knew everybody in London; and it also amused her when she began to meet him at dances, for he didn't dance. He was interesting and very useful, and she was quite pleased that he was willing to be appropriated in the same way as John and Lawrence Ackroyd: and the knowledge that it was a different way came to her as a shock one night in June when, at a ball, he kissed her. The dance was in Onslow Square and she was sitting out with him in the gardens at the back of the house, the darkness was punctuated with the glowworm-like flicker of fairy lights. She was begging him to take her and Phil to the Zoo on the following Sunday afternoon, and he was trying to extract a promise from her instead that she would come down to lunch with him at his house in Buckinghamshire and be introduced to his sister; then suddenly she felt his arm round her shoulders. She drew back her head but he held her and kissed her twice. She sprang up, too angry to speak, and when he tried to catch hold of her

again she struck his hand away with her clenched fist and almost ran towards the house. He was really surprised ; he thought she expected him to kiss her—most women liked it, that was his experience—and he believed her to be coquetting until he saw her face in the light that streamed into the garden from the conservatory. She had struck at him with all her strength too, and the diamond in her ring had cut his hand and drawn blood.

“ I didn’t think you’d behave like a little prudish schoolgirl,” he remonstrated at the foot of the steps. “ Look what you’ve done to my hand ! ”

“ I’m glad,” she said wrathfully. “ I hope I’ve hurt you very much.” And she walked up the steps, leaving him feeling both foolish and annoyed—annoyed with her, not with himself.

As she stepped into the conservatory she met Lawrence Ackroyd, who was looking for her ; she had promised him the next dance. It was two o’clock in the morning and she had been dancing for four hours. It was a hot airless night, and the conservatory was full of heavily scented lillies and orchids. She felt suddenly tired, and sank into a chair.

“ I want to go home,” she said appealingly. “ I can’t dance any more.”

“ Let me fetch you something to drink.”

“ No—but please find Gilbert for me and tell him I’ve a headache.”

She wondered why he looked at her anxiously as he turned away ; there seemed to be both suspicion and pity in his kind eyes. She wondered uneasily whether he could possibly have seen her being kissed in the garden ; she sat there hating the man for having dared to touch her when she hadn’t wanted

him to. Lawrence Ackroyd hadn't seen that, but he had noticed that Gilbert was sitting out in a dark secluded corner upstairs with Lady Blake, and he wondered whether Anne was suffering a pang of jealousy; she looked white and uneasy, and not happy. But a headache was a sufficient explanation both for him and for Gilbert whom he routed out with alacrity. Anne was subject to sudden nervous headaches.

"Poor kid!" said Gilbert when he was informed. He jumped up and left his partner with a quick apology. "They're beastly things, Anne's headaches. She collapses utterly."

He ran downstairs to fetch Anne's cloak. Lawrence Ackroyd noted with satisfaction both Lady Blake's obvious vexation and Gilbert's tender care of Anne, who turned to him with the docile dependence of a very tired child.

The next day she received a note:

"DEAR MRS. TREVOR,

Please accept my apologies for offending you. If I lost my head remember that it was you who turned it, so will you come to the Zoological Gardens with me on Sunday as a token of your forgiveness? Yours very sincerely,

BRADLEY MUSGRAVE."

Anne scrumpled it up angrily and tossed it into the waste-paper basket.

Phil had a habit of ransacking the waste-paper basket in search of useful treasures. He found the letter. It was written on a large sheet of very good thick notepaper, so he smoothed out the creases

with a careful sticky hand, and took it to his father with the request to have it made into a paper boat.

"Let's see what it is, sonny." Gilbert read it, and said, "Look here, Phil, you must not take people's letters."

He tore the letter in pieces, and Phil gave a despairing wail.

"I'll make you a boat out of *The Times*," promised Gilbert.

"No, I wanted a *likkle* boat!" roared Phil indignantly.

"What's the matter?" asked Anne, looking in at the door. She was going out, but was arrested by the voice of her infuriated son.

"Daddy has tore up my boat."

"The child had picked a letter of yours out of the waste-paper basket," explained Gilbert. "A note from Musgrave. I've torn it up, and I should advise you to do the same in the future. Shut up, Phil! Here's sixpence, go out with nurse and buy a beastly boat."

"Shan't buy a beastly boat. I shall buy a nice boat, a paddle steamer wif a turbine engine and a funnel."

"You do spoil that child," said Anne, as Phil darted away, dry-eyed and smiling. She came into the room and glanced quickly at Gilbert, her head held higher than usual, her eyes defiant, her lips half parted. She was ready to fly into a rage if he found fault with her, and to melt into tears if he was sympathetic, and until she found out whether she was going to be scolded or petted she bore herself proudly, hating the situation. He asked:

"Are you going to the Zoo on Sunday?"

"Certainly not," she said.

"Just as well perhaps," said Gilbert. "He's a bit of a blackguard." He eyed her quizzically and said, "I suppose he tried to kiss you?"

Anne nodded. Gilbert looked rather amused.

"If you *will* flirt with that type of man. . . ." He lit a cigarette.

"I hate that sort of thing," Anne said fiercely. "I've not answered his letter."

"I dare say he'll get over it. You're not the only pretty woman he's made love to, by all accounts."

Anne felt as if the wind were taken out of her sails—if a little yacht on such occasions feels baffled, lonely, and a lost sense of direction. She also felt humiliation; but whether it was the remains of the sense of humiliation from the night before, or a fresh humiliation because Gilbert seemed to take her distress lightly, she could not have explained. He changed the conversation by saying:

"Is that a new frock, you extravagant little minx?"

"It's only a muslin."

"Well, I warn you, Anne, I've overdrawn my account."

"I haven't this year, I've been awfully economical."

"It doesn't look like it."

"But you don't want me to *look* like it, do you?"

It was a very fine summer. In July there came a fortnight of thunderstorms and damp sultry heat. Phil, who usually seemed to be compounded of quicksilver and steel springs, flagged and was peevish and languid. Anne grew pale, and Gilbert persuaded her to take the child into the country to Francesca.

He had a case coming on, and couldn't leave London till the end of the month.

"We'll shut up the house and I'll live at my Club," he said; "it will save money."

Down in the country it was almost as hot as in London. But the nights were cool, there was shade in the garden, and the air was sweet with the scent of hay and honeysuckle by day, and with stocks and nicotines in the evening when Francesca watered her parched flowers. Phil revived and romped in the hay-fields all day, and was allowed to stay up later than usual and play with the hose, and get very wet and very much in the way. His daily ambition was to water the birds on the lawn, the thrushes and black-birds and starlings who, emboldened by thirst, came down in little flocks to drink from the pools the dry turf was too hard to suck up quickly. Francesca was delighted to have them earlier than she had anticipated, for she had arranged to go to Norway for August, leaving Gilbert and Anne in possession of her house and servants; and she was glad to have Anne and Phil to herself for a little while. She decided that Anne had not grown any older since the first day she had seen her, the tired, shy, travel-stained child Gilbert had brought home with such anxious pride; in all essentials she was as young as ever, as young as Phil. In those hot midsummer days Francesca sometimes felt as if she had two little boys of five years old as her guests, instead of one little boy and his mother. Phil seemed to regard his mother as a contemporary rather than as an adult. If he was naughty, his mischievous eyes looked at Anne in curiosity to see how she was taking it, not abashed in quest of reproof.

"I wish I hadn't settled to go on this cruise," Francesca said one morning at breakfast. "I should enjoy myself much more at home with you all. Which day does Gilbert come down?"

Anne had a letter from him in her hand, and she looked up from it with rueful eyes.

"He doesn't say," she said slowly. "He's been invited to go to Cowes for the Regatta week on the Blakes' yacht, and he's going."

"I'm sorry, I suppose I shall miss him then." Francesca saw that Anne was disappointed, and her own regret at missing part of his visit was compensated for by the revelation that a few days' separation could still depress Anne. Certainly the marriage had turned out very well, she reflected, as she turned to intervene between Phil and the honey.

"It is meant to be taken internally, darling, not applied externally as an ointment, the way you're doing. Let me help you."

Anne was disappointed because she would have liked to go to Cowes. She thought that the Blakes might have invited her; she would have conquered her dislike of them for the occasion. She tore up the letter, and said crossly:

"For Heaven's sake, Francesca, don't give that messy child any more honey!"

"Put some marmalade on top of the honey," Phil suggested; "that won't make it nearly so sticky." As this amendment was not carried he filled his mouth full and ransacked his brain for another contentious subject. He never let the conversation flag. "Nanny says that Joseph was a man," he announced. "I mean Joseph wif all those lots of brothers."

"Of course he was a man," said Anne. "What did you suppose he was?"

"Well, Francesca told me he had a coat of many colours, so of course I fought he was a lady."

Anne laughed.

"Look here, Francesca, if you're going to teach the child Scripture you must stay here and take the consequences—not go off to Norway and leave me to deal with the results."

"It will be a nice occupation for Gilbert," said Francesca, as Phil escaped into the garden through the window.

"I'm sure Gilbert doesn't know anything about it."

"My dear child! Every educated man knows the Bible."

"Oh well, perhaps the stories . . ."

Francesca sailed for Norway on August 6th. Everybody seemed to be going abroad this year, Anne thought, except herself. The Dalliacs were at Aix-les-Bains; Lawrence Ackroyd was in the Pyrenees; everyone else either at Marienbad or in Switzerland. John remained in London and hoped to go away for a holiday in September. Anne was resigning herself to a dutiful domestic August that would be rather dull. It was too hot for Gilbert's ways of amusing himself in the country. While she was lazily pondering over the problem in a deck-chair in the shade of the trees on the parched lawn, a letter from Gilbert was brought out to her.

"ON BOARD THE 'BRITOMART,'

EAST COWES.

DEAREST ANNE,

I'm glad to hear from Francesca that you and Phil look better for the change. I'm having

quite a good time. It is amusing here though the races themselves are a bit slow to watch, there hasn't been enough wind. Blake is taking the *Britomart* for a cruise up to the West Coast of Scotland, and they've asked me to go along too. I've often wanted to do the trip, and it seems as if we're in for a really fine August, so I thought I might as well accept the invitation. We shall only be gone about a fortnight or three weeks, so I'll join you towards the end of the month. We shall put in at Stranraer for letters, and then Oban, but I can't give you dates. You know how it is when one is more or less dependent upon wind and weather. Love to Francesca, yourself and the kid.

Affectionately yours,
GILBERT."

Francesca was taking a last aimless survey of her domain before driving to the station to catch her train.

"I hope everything will be comfortable for you, dear," she said for the twentieth time. "A letter from Gilbert?"

"Yes," said Anne. "He sends you his love."

She refrained from telling her that Gilbert wasn't coming, that he was going yachting. She could not have explained why she refrained, except that she wasn't sure that her voice would be under control: she was hurt and very angry. "It is selfish!" she said to herself vehemently. "Frightfully selfish!" But whether it was Gilbert's selfishness that made her hot and angry, or her own selfishness in being angry, she neither knew nor cared. She was jealous

too, but she wasn't jealous of Lady Blake, she was envious of the yachting expedition.

Francesca saw that she looked troubled when she said good-bye to her, and appropriating it as a compliment, kissed her very tenderly.

"She's an affectionate darling anyway," she thought as she waved to the pretty little creature.

CHAPTER XII

FOR three days Anne pitied herself for being left to spend a dull holiday in the depths of a scorched country-side with only the companionship of Phil, and the servants, and the Vicar's wife, who came to tea and tried to be kind to her. Then she would have welcomed all the dullness in the world with tears of relief, for Phil was ill. He cried, and complained of a pain inside, and when Anne sent for the doctor his temperature was a hundred and three. The doctor, who was a kind old man, but slow of speech and a hard drinker, hesitated over his diagnosis. After two days' suspense, as Phil still lay with flushed cheeks, either whimpering with pain, or, worse still, limp, patient, and semi-conscious, Anne, in a fury of impatience, anxiety, and terror, decided to take him back to London, where she could have other advice. The Vicar's wife, a timid, fatalistic lady, remonstrated. In her opinion no doctors understood anything about children, and the honest ones said so; she had never heard of a sick child being taken on a journey to London; sick children were better in their beds and in country air. But the doctor, who did not understand the case, and was afraid of Anne, sanctioned the experiment. So she telegraphed to have the house made ready, and Phil was wrapped in blankets and taken home.

Anne knew as much about illness as she did about the language of ancient Egypt. She knew that hieroglyphics and diseases existed, and there her knowledge ended. She had vaguely hoped that the journey might have "done Phil good," but when their own doctor arrived the child's temperature was 104. Dr. Langland said "appendicitis," and advised an operation.

Anne turned very white.

"Oh! He's too little!" she said.

"Where is your husband?" enquired Dr. Langland. "He ought to be sent for."

"I don't know," she faltered. "He's yachting."

"Well, he's spared the anxiety," he said kindly. "But don't you worry. I'll send in a nurse. Would you like a second opinion, to see if an operation is avoidable?"

"Oh yes! Let's have a children's specialist."

"I'll telephone to Woodward. And shall I settle up with him about his fee for you?"

"Please do. I've very little money. If he must have the operation, who is the best surgeon in London?"

"I think we'll have Ryland. He's a clever young man, and his fee won't be quite so stiff as one of those big guns, and he'll do it just as well."

"I don't care a bit about fees," said Anne haughtily. "If he must be operated on, it must be by the very best surgeon. It is a matter of life and death."

"I don't know about that," he said soothingly. "Of course, your very experienced man is probably quicker, and that counts; but otherwise, the care and the knowledge . . ."

Anne wasn't listening.

"Isn't Sir Bradley Musgrave supposed to be the best surgeon there is?" she asked.

"He is a very fine big-wig," said the doctor. "His fees are exorbitant. I don't think that for a simple case of appendicitis it would be necessary to call him in. It really is a very easy operation. As a matter of fact, I could do it myself. I have done it frequently, only you wouldn't trust me." He tried to reassure her, but Anne realised he was being reassuring and discounted every word he said.

Dr. Woodward arrived that evening, examined the child, confirmed the diagnosis, praised the treatment, changed it entirely by prescribing the application of ice-bags instead of hot fomentations, and advised an operation if the symptoms weren't materially relieved within twenty-four hours. Phil, very thin, with a burning spot of pink on each cheek, was delirious. The next morning his temperature was lower, but he was weaker and crying with pain. Anne, white-faced, with black shadows under her eyes, insisted upon sending for Dr. Woodward again, and when the specialist repeated his advice of the evening before with the additional recommendation that Anne should have some food and rest herself, she waved Dr. Langland's kindly platitudes aside and went to the telephone.

"I know Sir Bradley Musgrave," she said. "I'm going to ask him to do the operation."

Dr. Langland attempted to dissuade her: he thought the great man would consider him a fool for bringing him to Chelsea for such a simple operation, and he did not feel justified in allowing her to incur an avoidable heavy expense because she was panic-

stricken. He was a kind-hearted, sensible man : in his large practice the expense of illness and an operation was invariably a serious consideration. He tried to spare his patients superfluous expense as conscientiously as he tried to save them unnecessary pain. He knew the Trevors were not so rich that they could afford to disregard elementary common sense over money, and in Gilbert's absence he felt responsible for any decision that was made, especially as Anne was so young and seemed to be so foolish.

"I warn you his fee will be outrageous. He piles it on to avoid being worked to death. There are dozens of capable surgeons."

Anne turned on him like a little fury.

"I don't care a bit what it costs ! You said yourself it made a difference if it was done quickly." She rang up 180 Cavendish Square.

"Is Sir Bradley Musgrave there ?" she asked nervously.

He was not there : he had gone into Buckinghamshire for the week-end and would return on Sunday evening. This was Saturday morning. She turned indignantly to Dr. Langland :

"He's not there ! He's no business to go out of London like this when people may be ill and want him." Then, to the voice at the other end of the telephone, she said : "Can you give me his telephone number ?"

"His line is out of order, madam," was the answer. "Can I give any message ? We are sending Sir Bradley's letters and messages down to him by train."

"What's his address ?"

"'The Retreat,' Little Hinton."

“ Is that the station ? ”

“ No, madam ; Missenden is the station.”

She hung up the receiver, and picked up the A B C from Gilbert’s writing-table.

“ I shall go down and ask him to come up to Phil at once,” she said. “ It is only an hour in the train.”

“ If you absolutely insist on having him why not telegraph ? ” said Dr. Langland, rather vexed that he was unable to influence her.

“ A telegram is so difficult,” she said hesitatingly. “ And I shall get there almost as quickly.” She ran upstairs.

“ I do look a fright,” she said impatiently as she glanced at herself in the glass in her bedroom, but she had time to change her clothes. She put on her prettiest muslin dress, and her most becoming hat ; and she changed her shoes and stockings for ones that matched her frock. Then, as she made hay in a drawer looking for a clean pair of gloves, she turned up a little bottle of liquid rouge she had bought to make up her face for some private theatricals she and Gilbert had taken part in one Christmas.

“ I should look less of a fright if I weren’t so pale,” she reflected ; so she smeared a little rouge on each cheek in a great hurry, and ran down to the taxi she had sent for. She just caught her train at Marylebone.

When she was well on her way she began to wonder what she was going to say to Sir Bradley when she reached him. She had never answered his letter, and had not seen him since she had informed him in all sincerity that she hoped she had hurt him very much. She supposed that was childish, that she had made an unwarrantable fuss. Gilbert had seemed to think

so. Now she was going to ask a favour of him without any preliminary breaking of the barrier of ice she had erected. Dr. Langland seemed to consider it would be a great favour if he cut short his week-end in the country to come back to town for an operation which other surgeons in London were both competent and willing to perform. Anne didn't care. If Gilbert had been at home she would thankfully have left everything to him, and not questioned any decision he had made; but as Gilbert wasn't there she had no confidence in anyone else, and was going to take no risks with Phil. He must have the very best advice there was to be got, and she was going to get it for him. After all, she and Sir Bradley had been very good friends until he had spoiled everything. But assuredly she could not have peremptorily summoned him by a telegram.

She had a carriage to herself and tried to rest. After two sleepless nights she was very tired, but the refrain the train sang to her was "Gilbert shouldn't have left me. Phil is going to die." She hadn't cried, and she wouldn't cry, but the effort she made not to break down and cry from tiredness, and fear, and misery tired her more. Although she was in a feverish hurry and resented the train stopping at any stations, she reached Missenden before she'd made up her mind what she was going to say when she arrived.

The porter at the station told her it was three miles to Little Hinton and volunteered to find her a conveyance. A shabby open landau was fetched while she waited on the platform: it was drawn by a bony white horse with hairy hoofs and a concave spine, and driven by a round-faced boy. As she was drawn up

the hill along a dusty high-road in the glaring August sunshine, her mind was invaded by a new idea that, for the time being, ousted her nervousness of meeting Sir Bradley Musgrave, for she suddenly remembered that Gilbert had told her that he had overdrawn his account : perhaps there was no money to pay for the operation. This fear she dismissed peremptorily : perhaps Sir Bradley Musgrave would do the operation for nothing, she said to herself soothingly.

The drive seemed interminable. The road was hot, and dusty with the chalk-dust that whitened the grass and hedges on either side. There was not enough wind to make a ripple on the fields of ripe corn that were waiting to be harvested. The briony and traveller's-joy that tangled the hedges were covered with a thick coating of white dust. Even the larks sounded plaintive and thirsty to Anne's imagination. The glare made her head ache, so she fixed her eyes on the back of the driver's coat ; it was green, but at each side of the seams there was a streak of dark blue—she found her attention concentrating on the colour problem it presented, when he stopped in the welcome shade of some trees at a white gate. He turned round and touched his right eyebrow with his forefinger :

“ Here is ‘ The Retreat,’ miss. Will you have me wait for you ? ”

“ Yes, please.”

The garden was shady and green, and cool after the glare of the long white road. The long, low red-brick house was covered with creepers. White and green sun-blinds at all the windows gave it the appearance of lying with closed eyes half asleep. The door was opened by a manservant who ushered

her through a large hall into a cool room at the back of the house, and left her there with the information that Sir Bradley was in the garden and should be told of her arrival. The room was on the shady side of the house, so the sun-blinds were up, and through the open windows Anne could see a pretty garden planted with pleached fruit trees, rose bushes in curved beds on the lawn, weeping-willow trees, and tall masses of herbaceous flowers. The room itself was luxuriously furnished with large soft sofas and arm-chairs, mirrors, etchings on the walls, heavy silk curtains at the windows and over the doors, and vases of roses on the mantelpiece and on the little tables—a commonplace, expensive room. For no reason Anne's courage began to desert her. She began to wish she hadn't come as she sat in the comfortable arm-chair she had sunk into. There was dead silence in the house until the door opened and Sir Bradley Musgrave came into the room.

He greeted Anne with genial cordiality; he had got over his surprise in the garden. There was a twinkle of suppressed amusement in his eyes, but he saw at a glance that she was embarrassed and tried to put her at her ease. He also saw at the same glance that she had painted her cheeks, and that she had done it very badly.

"I'm delighted to see you, Mrs. Trevor. Are you staying in the neighbourhood?"

"No," said Anne, "I have just come down by train. I tried to telephone to you, but your line was out of order."

"Yes, it's too bad. I must make a fuss; it deprived me of the pleasure of meeting you at the station. How did you get here?"

"I got a trap. It is waiting for me."

"We'll send it away." He rang the bell.

"Oh no, please not!" she exclaimed. "I must take the next train back."

"I've the car here," he said. Then, to the servant who appeared: "Richards, send Mrs. Trevor's trap away, and hurry on lunch a bit—and bring something to drink." He drew up a chair nearer to Anne and said:

"Don't talk about trains back, you've only just come. This is really very nice of you."

He leaned back in his chair and smiled at her. Anne pulled herself together, collected her wits, and smiled a little shyly and uncertainly. He said to himself that she really was very charming.

"I've come to you because I'm in trouble," she said.

"I'm sorry you're in trouble, but I'm glad you've come to me. I hope it is nothing serious?"

"Phil, my little boy, has got appendicitis."

"Have you come to me professionally?" he asked, surprised and perplexed.

"Yes—at least my husband is away—and I thought you could help me," she pleaded. "Oughtn't I to have come?"

"Of course you ought to have come! What a question! We're good friends, aren't we?" He held out his hand, and when Anne gave him hers he held it and patted it. "What would you like me to do? Come back with you and see the young shaver? How old is he?"

"Six."

"Ridiculous! Fancy you having a son of six."

"The doctor says he ought to have the operation."

"Oh you've got a doctor for him, then?"

"Dr. Langland: and I'm so afraid for him."

"Nothing to be afraid of! What's appendicitis? Don't you worry. I'll run you up in the car after lunch and have a look at him. Ah, Richards!" as the man brought in a silver tray laden with decanters and syphons and glasses. "I shall want the car at half-past two—and get my things ready, will you? And tell Miss Musgrave that Mrs. Trevor is here.—That's my sister. Now what will you have? Let me mix you a very mild cock-tail."

"No, only soda-water, please. I'm very thirsty. It's awfully kind of you."

"Kind to give a guest a glass of water? Is that all you'll have?"

"I mean kind about Phil."

"It is kind of you to come all this way to find me, uncommonly kind."

"And if he must have the operation . . ."

"If he must it will be over before you've time to worry about it. You'd like me to do it?"

"Please . . ." Anne's eyes were grateful and beseeching. She would have liked to say more but the door opened, an old lady came in, and Sir Bradley introduced them.

"My sister—Mrs. Trevor. She's deaf," he explained. Miss Musgrave was the ugliest woman Anne had ever seen. She was very stout and short, had a square dark face, a large mouth, a large red nose, heavy black eyebrows and small very bright dark eyes. Her white hair was covered by an elaborate white lace cap trimmed with mauve ribbons, and she wore a heavy black satin dress trimmed with jet. She carried a little grey terrier

under one arm and a large ear-trumpet trimmed with frills of black lace which she put to her ear and pointed at Anne. Anne could think of nothing to say into it and looked appealingly at her host, who shouted down :

“ This is Mrs. Trevor, a friend of mine. She’s come to lunch, and I’m going to drive her home this afternoon.”

Then the little dog barked. Miss Musgrave looked at Anne quickly and turned away ; her eyes seemed full of malice and ill-will. Anne thought she was a terrifying old lady, and wasn’t at all sure whether she was speaking to her or to the little barking dog when she muttered :

“ Bad little girl ! bad little girl ! ” which was the only remark she made.

Anne’s inclination was to talk about Phil’s illness : but her host seemed to have dismissed the subject from his mind, and the matter-of-fact, almost careless, kindness with which he had accepted the case reassured Anne more than any protestations he could have made. He could not think Phil’s illness so terribly serious, she reasoned, if he could talk so cheerfully and easily about such unimportant subjects as his roses, and the rival merits of Sauterne and sparkling Moselle, when they sat down to lunch. He did not think seriously of Phil’s illness. He did not even take Anne’s anxiety very seriously. Thanks to the artificial colour on her cheeks she looked quite well, meretriciously frivolous, and not in the least like a wan and worried mother. Also, she was so relieved at having accomplished the object of her errand so easily, and felt such confidence in his superior attainments as a surgeon that her spirits

rose, and out of gratitude to him, and in sheer reaction after the exaggerated fears of the journey down, she responded to his evident desire to have a cheerful meal. She could do no less than be charming, restore the situation that had existed before she had quarrelled with him, and renew the gay, spritely, friendly relationship that had a very subtle, undefined ingredient in it that made it amusing to them both.

He showed her his roses, cut some half-blown buds for her, and made her pretty speeches. She accepted his neatly turned compliments as graciously as she took the flowers.

"It is too bad that your visit is so short," he said as two o'clock struck. "If we're to start in half an hour I must go and change." He was in flannels. "When will you come again?"

"When Phil is better," she said.

"We'll soon have him better," he assured her. "I'll leave you with my sister while I get ready. Have you a cloak for motoring?"

"No, but it doesn't matter."

"We'll find you something. We mustn't spoil that very pretty frock."

Miss Musgrave was sitting in the hall, cutting pictures out of magazines and newspapers and pasting them into a scrap-book.

"I make these for the heathen children," she said, turning her beady bright eyes on Anne. "Are you interested in Missions?"

She put up her ear-trumpet, and Anne said "No" into it: the statement sounded bald.

"I support the Wesleyan West African Mission. I make them twenty-four of these books every year,

two a month. They cost me nothing. I make the leaves out of brown paper, and get the pictures out of the papers that Bradley brings down, and the circulars that come by post. It is a very good idea." She again put up her ear-trumpet towards Anne, and this time Anne said "Yes" into it.

She felt she would say something idiotic if she had to speak into it again, and she was thankful when her host came downstairs. The motor was brought round, and Richards came into the hall in his chauffeur's livery, and fetched a small brown leather bag from upstairs. Sir Bradley unfolded a large thin linen rug that he had over his arm.

"We'll wrap you up in this as a shawl," he said to Anne, "and you'd better put this on your head." It was a large white chiffon scarf. Anne wondered where he had got it from, it did not look as if it could possibly be one of Miss Musgrave's possessions. "You really must," he insisted as she half protested. "You've no idea how dusty you'll get. Our roads are terrible this summer. Your hat would be ruined, and your hair would be white with chalk-dust. What lovely hair you've got! How long is it when it is down? Does it reach to your knees? Like heroines in books?"

"No. I keep it cut."

"It must be heavy. I'm glad it is on your head and not on mine."

He folded the rug diagonally and put it round her, sent Richards for a safety-pin and fastened it for her, and then stooped to kiss his sister who had not moved from her chair, but continued to cut out pictures from the *Daily Graphic*.

"Good-bye, Georgina; you can expect me back

when you see me." Anne shook the limp hand extended to her, evaded the ear-trumpet, and was put into the back of the car. Sir Bradley sat down beside her and tucked another rug over their knees.

"Richards has to drive me always," he said. "I should like to drive myself, but I daren't. A surgeon has to be as careful of his hands as a pianist."

The car glided swiftly down the long hill. The speed was exhilarating. She was glad to be away from the house; and the knowledge that she was on her way back to Phil with her errand accomplished restored to Anne something of her usual pleasure in life. The only thought that disturbed her was the recollection that she had not broached the subject of the fee for the operation, if an operation was inevitable. It had been difficult before, so she had postponed it to find it was not easy now. After they had gone some miles she told herself it had got to be done, for Dr. Langland had informed her that it was customary to pay specialists and surgeons their fees immediately. She looked thoughtful, and Sir Bradley, who was watching her, noticed her sudden absent-mindedness.

"What's the matter?" he enquired.

"The operation . . ."

"Don't worry. We don't know that it is necessary yet."

"But if it is, I—I shan't be able to give you a cheque for it till Gilbert comes home, because I think I've overdrawn my account." Anne used that phrase because she thought it sounded more business-like than to say she hadn't any money.

"Don't you think about that. I don't send bills in to my friends."

He smiled at her, and in response to the somewhat embarrassed expression of thanks she faltered, he put his arm round her waist and drew nearer to her.

"That will be all right," he assured her, "you can thank me when you come down here next time."

She tried to move away from him, glancing hurriedly and agonisingly at the chauffeur. He mistook the origin of her reluctance.

"Richards is a well-trained servant," he said soothingly. "He won't look round."

He kept his arm round her, and Anne felt unable to fly into a rage and order him to release her; she was under too great an obligation to him. She flushed deeply, her lips quivered, and she looked at him with the pleading eyes that Gilbert rarely resisted.

"Please don't," she implored.

He thought her a very finished and accomplished coquette. To do him justice, he was convinced that she meant him to make love to her. He imagined that she had seized upon the child's illness as a plausible excuse for renewing their acquaintanceship and for betraying contrition for her ridiculous behaviour to him in June. Her own doctor must have told her there were plenty of good surgeons in London, he had argued, it wasn't wholly on the child's account she had sought him. In his experience of women, worried mothers of children at death's door didn't paint their faces, put on pretty frocks and come out for a jaunt into the country. He withdrew his arm though, to her great relief; but to her dismay he began to talk about her next visit to

"The Retreat" as if she had promised to spend a week-end there.

"I said I'd come for lunch," she said.

"I shan't be satisfied with such a flying visit next time," he assured her hospitably. "I've a lot to show you. You needn't be afraid, you know. My sister is there to play propriety. No harm in your coming into the country alone to spend a night or two with an old lady who's taken a fancy to you, is there?"

"No, of course not," she said hastily.

"Splendid old woman, my sister," he said; "she's a great comfort. As long as she's got a small dog and a few picture papers she's perfectly contented. Thinks I'm a model brother because I supply her with both."

To Anne, with her nerves on edge, the drive seemed intolerably long; in order to steer clear of her host's sentimentality she talked gaily and flip-pantly, and laughed, a little hysterically, until they were actually at the door. Then, as he crossed the threshold, Sir Bradley Musgrave was metamorphosed from the apparently idle, cynical, unprincipled *flâneur* into a dignified, calm, level-headed man of science. Dr. Langland had just arrived. Anne introduced them, and the two men went up to the nursery together. Phil was awake and scowled at the surgeon suspiciously.

"I don't want no more beastly doctors touching me," he declared.

"You must be good, darling!" Anne said. "If you won't cry, I'll buy you anything you like."

"Will you buy me a dog?"

A dog was the one thing Gilbert had refused him.

"Yes, ducky, as soon as you're better."

"A real live dog? One that barks, wif a tail that wags and a collar?"

"Yes, darling; I promise."

"Then I won't cry. And when the dog dies I'll have him stuffed and keep him always." He lay still, with his forehead puckered into a frown, and said defiantly:

"Now you can touch me."

Sir Bradley's examination was over in a few seconds. He decided that an operation was inevitable, and that it would be better to do it at once, as a restless, feverish night wouldn't do the child any good. Dr. Langland agreed, and the two doctors discussed anæsthetics while the nurse prepared the room. Anne sat by Phil's bed trying to amuse him. Then she had to go downstairs to wait alone.

She had nerved herself to wait for hours, and it was a shock when Dr. Langland came down to her after a very short time.

"It is all over," he said cheerily. "By Jove! The man is a marvel! It is an education to see a master-hand like his operate. And Phil has stood it splendidly. The little fellow has your pluck."

Anne didn't feel plucky, she felt seasick. Sir Bradley, who had followed Dr. Langland downstairs, thought she was going to faint. She was very white, for she had washed her face, but she kept a tight hold of her nerves and all her will-power, and poured out tea for them with as much self-command as if she were quite used to children having operations every afternoon.

Sir Bradley came the next morning to see the child.

"He's a splendid patient," he assured Anne when they stood in the drawing-room again. "He'll be as right as ninepence now. He's full of vitality too, jolly little chap. You'll have him running about in a fortnight. Arrange to get him away to the seaside, to the East Coast."

"I wish I could thank you," she stammered, her beautiful eyes suddenly full of tears. "I never can . . ."

"Oh yes you can, bless you. You're coming down to 'The Retreat' when that youngster is on his legs again! In the meantime, you can give me something on account if you like." He laid his hands gently on her shoulders. Anne turned very red, held up an ashamed, reluctant face with downcast eyes, and let him kiss her.

CHAPTER XIII

ONE evening, a fortnight after the operation, there came a trunk call on the telephone, and Anne heard Gilbert, frantic with anxiety, speaking from Glasgow.

"How is Phil?"

"Better—nearly well."

"Is that you, Anne?"

"Yes."

"I'm on my way home. I only reached Oban this afternoon and got your letters and telegrams—just had time to catch the train. I'm coming up to-night. You poor child, how are you?"

"I'm all right."

"But, Anne darling, all those letters and telegrams are a fortnight old. I've had the most awful fright!"

"I sent a telegram to say the operation was safely over and quite successful. Didn't you get that?"

"Yes, but . . ." Before he could suggest that he considered it an inadequate allowance of news he was cut off.

He arrived the next morning before Anne was up. She was so thankful to hear his voice that she forgot her intention of showing him that she had been annoyed with him for going away, and ran downstairs in her dressing-gown straight into his arms.

Gilbert was full of remorse as he hurried to London, remorse for having left Anne and Phil alone while he

enjoyed himself, and for having gone beyond recall. If anything had happened he would never have forgiven himself, he said so to Anne as he put her heavy hair back from her face with a tender hand and kissed her little pale face.

"You mean if Phil had died," she said, using the words he had shrunk from; "but that wouldn't have been your fault. I did wish you'd been here. It was so awful. But he's all right; come up and see him. The hospital nurse went yesterday. Nurse takes care of him by day, and I sleep with him at night, but he never woke once. And I'm going to take him to the seaside as soon as Dr. Langland says he may go."

Phil was so well and cheerful that Gilbert began to feel the seriousness of the danger had been exaggerated, that he had been unnecessarily agitated by Anne's frightened letters and telegrams. Surely no little boy who had been in the valley of the shadow of death two weeks ago could be in such riotous spirits, and clamouring so vociferously for his breakfast.

"I've got a dog, Daddy! And it's chewed up one of your shoes."

Anne would have chosen to introduce the dog more tactfully.

"I promised him a dog if he was good and didn't cry. And he was awfully good, Gilbert. He never cried at all, not even when he came to after the ether or whatever they gave him."

"And I've named him Samuel," shouted Phil, "because of Samuel in the Bible."

"What is the connection?" Gilbert asked.

"I don't know," Anne said. "Phil says he looks like Samuel. He's a Dandie Dinmont. I thought a

fox-terrier would be nicer, but Phil bargained for a dog with a tail that wagged, and terriers haven't much tail."

"Well, if the dog is an accomplished fact I suppose it must be borne with." He pulled Anne's hair. "You didn't tell me what I was coming home to. A telegram to say you'd acquired a dog named Samuel would have been reassuring. I should have had a better night."

Later, at breakfast, he said :

"The little chap seems remarkably well. Did Langland do the operation ?"

"No, of course not. I wouldn't trust him. I got Sir Bradley Musgrave."

"Oh! you got that man, did you?" Gilbert sounded slightly surprised.

"He's the best surgeon in London now. Everybody says that. More coffee?"

"Please. I suppose this is Samuel?"

A small grey dog with crooked brown legs and tragic brown eyes dashed into the room and tried to express his delight at being alive and in such congenial company by squirming, and panting, and beating the carpet heavily with his tail.

"Yes. I got him at a shop in a slum. I dare say they'd stolen him. He was three pounds; is that much for a dog? It was the only thing Phil wanted."

Anne was much more eager to tell him all about the dog than to hear about his yachting trip Gilbert noted. He had anticipated a very different homecoming. He had pictured an overwrought Anne weeping over a sick child in a distraught household, and himself soothing and consoling her, and putting everything right: another vision he had had was of

a rather sulky young wife, bored by his absence, being wooed back to amiability by his amusing stories of his yachting experiences. Instead, Phil was in apparent robust health, Anne was neither tearful, nor cross, nor interested in his adventures; she had managed very well without him, and had calmly added a dog to the establishment. He had summoned various good qualities to attend his home-coming, among them fortitude and sympathy; as none of them were immediately called upon he let them retire into the background, and began to think that he was tired, that the dog would be a nuisance, and that Anne was inconsiderate not to have written reassuringly.

"Marian Wyndham went with me to choose him," Anne was saying. "She understands about dogs. I met her on the Embankment. You remember Marian Wyndham?"

"That sandy-haired woman you met at the studio?"

"Yes. I'd not seen her for ages. She was very kind. She's awfully clever, she had a picture in the Salon this year, and one in the 'International' here. A landscape, it was hung on the line. Oh, there's Dr. Langland!"

After the physician had seen Phil, pronounced that he was as fit as a fiddle, and might be carried off to the seaside as soon as anybody liked, and the sooner the better, he smoked a cigarette with Gilbert in his study, and gave him the official account of the child's illness. When he had gone Gilbert sought Anne, who was rearranging the drawing-room, a pastime she indulged in about once a month. She welcomed him as a useful pawn in the game.

"I think the sofa would look better in the window," she said.

"Well then, I don't," he declared, sitting on the end of it. "And if it did, it is far too hot a day to spend chucking furniture about. What about money, Anne? I suppose this illness of Phil's will mount up to a pretty penny."

"I've paid the nurse out of the housekeeping money," she explained. "The shops can wait. And Dr. Langland settled up with the specialist we had."

"But the operation? How much will the fee for that run us into? Langland says you fixed up that, and that it will be pretty stiff. How I'm going to afford it I don't know."

Anne flushed scarlet as she moved a small chair.

"Sir Bradley didn't tell me. At least he said he wouldn't take any money for it."

"Do you mean to say he did it for nothing? That is uncommonly kind of him. I'll write and thank him."

"I . . . I wouldn't do that!" Anne said quickly.

"Why not?"

"It isn't . . . necessary."

"Not necessary? But hang it all, Anne, one can't take a thing like that and not be grateful. Of course I must write and thank him."

"I wouldn't if I were you," said Anne. "He wasn't really very nice about it."

"Not nice about it? What do you mean? First you tell me he isn't taking any money for the operation, and then that he wasn't very nice about it! Either I've got to send him a cheque or I haven't. And if I haven't, I must write him a decent letter."

"He doesn't deserve a decent letter!" Anne

declared as she walked to the window. "I wasn't going to tell you, but I suppose I'd better. You see . . . I told him about Phil . . . and I asked him to do the operation."

"So I imagined," said Gilbert impatiently. "I wasn't supposing he came out here and operated on the kid uninvited."

"No. He was away in Buckinghamshire. I went out there to find him. . . ."

"A damned silly thing for you to do! Go on!"

"I didn't care. It was to save Phil's life."

"Stuff! He's not the only surgeon in London who can operate for appendicitis without killing his patient."

"Phil was very ill: he'd got to have the best surgeon there was, and he's a splendid surgeon; but he's not a nice man. I had lunch with him and his sister at his house, and he motored me back, and then . . . he made things awfully difficult for me."

"In what way? Come, Anne, you're not a child," he added sharply. "Don't be a little fool!"

"I shan't answer at all if you speak to me like that."

"It is no use you getting in one of your silly tempers," he said with anger in his voice. "In what way did the man 'make things difficult for you'?"

"He insulted me," said Anne. "He made love to me, pretended I'd promised to—to go and spend a week-end with him. And of course I couldn't snub him at the time, when he'd just said he'd do the operation for Phil and not charge for it."

"Good Lord, Anne! Do you know what you're saying? Do you mean to stand there and tell me you made a—sort of bargain with him?"

"It wasn't quite like that," she said. "I had to

let him think what he liked ; but of course I never meant to go, I never meant to see him again ! Never ! And I haven't since the operation. He came once, and I said I was out."

Gilbert was white with rage.

" You . . . you infernal little cad ! " he said slowly.

Anne stared at him. She had expected sympathy. She saw a strange, contemptuous hostility in his face, and if her own familiar drawing-room had split into wreckage around her and thrown her out into the street she would have been less astounded and dismayed. She looked at him helplessly while she tried to gather up her faculties to bear what was happening to her.

" You seek out the man, knowing what his character is," he said with scornful cruelty ; " you throw yourself at his head, make a fool of him—make use of him, smile at him till you've got what you want out of him. You pretend, you trick him, never meaning to see him again. Upon my soul ! And then you expect anyone to have any respect for you ! "

He stalked out of the room, and out of the house. Anne heard him bang the front door.

She sat down because she was trembling too much to stand. She was quivering with what she imagined to be anger, passionate anger that Gilbert should have dared to speak to her with such scorn. She felt cold and sick with the intensity of her passion. And then she was frightened, because no fit of rage had ever frightened her before. She didn't understand what had happened to her. Gilbert had been cruel and unjust, and nothing in the world could ever be the same again. She felt as impotent and as desperate

as if he had committed some unforgivable crime before her eyes. If he had killed Phil, she thought she should have known what to do, she would have tried to kill him. He had made her hate him. That was what was the matter with her—it wasn't rage that was in her soul. Rage was something simple and transient and cleansing, like a storm of wind: this was hatred that had taken possession of her. She hated cruelty and injustice and treachery, and Gilbert had been cruel and unjust, and had betrayed her, so she hated Gilbert. She never wanted to see him again, unless she could retaliate by making him suffer. She buried her face in her hands, and tried in a confused, reckless hurry to think of means of revenge. She hadn't a pistol, so she couldn't shoot him; she thought of asking John to get her a pistol, only John might then insist upon shooting him for her, and she wanted to do it herself. Only if she killed Gilbert she would be found out and hanged, and Phil would be left an orphan. She encouraged these wild thoughts, for so long as she was thinking out fantastic schemes of vengeance her mind couldn't dwell on the pain of her own wounded spirit: perhaps it would punish Gilbert if she killed herself, only she wouldn't be there to enjoy his punishment. Besides, he might be sorry for her, and the idea of his pitying her made her revolt. She would make him sorry for himself, not for her. She glanced round the room: if she could destroy something, break something, perhaps the violence would break the terrible spell that was laid upon her, that was keeping her sitting there decorously in the drawing-room as if nothing had happened, although love was in ruins and her life devastated. But she was conscious of a strange

lassitude and a headache, and lacked energy to express her emotions violently, even if there was anything in the room she wanted to smash, and there wasn't. The only terror that prevented her throwing herself down on the floor in a storm of exhausted sobs and tears was the fear that Gilbert might return. She couldn't see him. She wanted never to see him again. She must think how that was to be managed. She couldn't think in the house. She must go out.

CHAPTER XIV

MARIAN WYNDHAM, crossing Chelsea Bridge at the end of the sultry afternoon she had spent painting on a wharf on the south side of the river, came upon Anne, standing by the parapet facing the power-station, staring down into the water. The tired painter rested her load of apparatus—the telescopic easel and a satchel containing her sketch-book, brush-box and paints—on the rail, and gazed at the grey, broad river. A fussy little blunt-nosed tug had just lowered her funnel and rushed under the bridge, the water churned into miniature waves in her wake.

“Jolly, isn’t it?” Marian said pleasantly, indicating the sudden broad curve of the river with her jerky, swift gesture. She was a thin, plain woman, with a sallow, nervous, clever face and untidy, straight, fair hair. Winter and summer, she always seemed to wear the same clothes, the loose, ill-fitting tweed coat and skirt of no particular colour, a putty-coloured shirt and a man’s tie, and a small battered hat very much on the back of her head. She had a fine brow, long sensitive hands, and kind, clear, fearless, thoughtful eyes that seemed to see rather more than other people’s eyes. She looked wistfully at the swirling water.

“I’ve been trying to paint it all day—the greys, the greys with green in them, and the greys with

yellow in them, and the little flashes of sunshine on the water that one could only get by dipping one's brush in liquid diamonds. And then one gets everything of the water on canvas except its liquidity."

"It is very dirty," said Anne with a little shiver of disgust.

Marian looked at her quickly, and asked :

"Your boy ? He's not worse I hope ?"

Anne shook her head.

"He's very well," she said listlessly. "I'm going to take him away."

Marian hoisted her paraphernalia on to her other shoulder and turned away from her beloved river.

"Come back to tea with me," she said. "I'm dying for tea, I've had no lunch."

She put her hand through the younger woman's arm and took her acquiescence for granted. She didn't know what was the matter with Anne ; when she first saw her white, set face she thought that the child was either much worse or dead. Something was evidently wrong. She was too tactful to ask any questions, and she didn't know her well enough to form any opinions ; she only knew she couldn't leave her alone on the bridge. So she kept her free hand on her arm, and walked along the Embankment and turned up Church Street, talking about various pictures in the summer exhibitions as they picked their way among the children who were playing and picnicking on the narrow, hot pavement. Marian was not sentimental, but she had once rescued a scared baby from an older child who was ill-treating it, and there was a look in Anne's eyes that reminded her of the expression of dazed, uncomprehending endurance there had been on the baby's face when she had

carried it home to its mother. She took Anne across the King's Road, opened a door up a narrow passage with a latchkey, and led the way up a flight of uncarpeted stairs into an untidy room that was partly studio, partly kitchen. The walls were covered with unframed canvases and charcoal sketches; the floor and furniture were littered with books and clothes. There was a rusty gas stove in the corner of the room, and a table piled with the remains of the last meal.

"Excuse the muddle, I'm packing," Marian explained. She pulled up a large wicker arm-chair and put Anne into it while she made preparations for tea. She lit a gas-ring and boiled a copper kettle, and produced biscuits, some cheese, and a pot of marmalade from the cupboard.

"I know I had some caviare somewhere," she said vaguely. "It's not on the mantelpiece, is it?"

Anne roused herself to look for the caviare, which was finally discovered on the window-sill in company with a cucumber, a jug of milk, and a cupful of butter.

"That's my larder." Marian frowned apologetically. "I'm sorry there's no bread." She took exquisite porcelain cups and saucers from a Sheraton corner cupboard and made tea. Anne lay back in the chair and drank the tea gratefully. She wasn't hungry, she said, when her hostess pressed food upon her. Marian sat on the floor, and ate cheese and marmalade on Bath Oliver biscuits, and smoked Russian cigarettes while she wondered what she was going to do with her guest next.

Marian at the age of fourteen had scandalised her mother and perplexed her father by remarking that,

in her opinion, there ought to be an Eleventh Commandment, "Thou shalt not funk." She was prepared to argue it out. It was part of her creed. She never refused to take on any responsibility that presented itself in need of adoption. So as Anne lay back in the wicker chair, and seemed disinclined to go home, Marian pondered over the problem she presented. She had had some sort of shock or blow. Marian could not question her, nor sympathise, and remain tactful; she could only guess. Anne was married; her child was not the origin of her trouble, therefore it was probably due to her husband. In Marian's second-hand experiences of matrimonial storms the trouble always was due to the husband, unless all unhappy wives were liars. She imagined a quarrel, thanked her lucky star that she was a spinster, and was not deterred from trying to help Anne by any paltry diffidence about the proverbial unwisdom of interference in the conjugal affairs of other people.

"You look fagged out," Marian observed after her third cigarette. "Why don't you and the kiddy come down to my bungalow with me to-morrow morning? I'm going by the nine twenty-five train. It's in Suffolk, right on the sea—very primitive, but quite jolly. It would do you both no end of good."

A shade of relief stole over Anne's face, and her eyes looked eager.

"Do come!" urged Marian. "I'm all alone there. I'm afraid there's not a room for the nurse, but he'll roll on the beach all day and won't want washing and dressing." She lit a fourth cigarette. "It is quite decent there, really; a nice woman comes in and does for me. And I get everything from a farm

—milk, bread, vegetables, butter and eggs, chickens, bacon, cream! Don't be afraid; the invalid won't be fed on caviare and cheese."

"I'm not afraid. . . ."

"Come on then! I love having visitors, and never get any because people always want such long notice, and I never know beforehand what I'm going to be doing or feeling like. You're not one of those stuffy people who make arrangements six months ahead."

Anne sat bolt upright in her chair.

"I'd love to come," she said. "May I bring the dog?"

Gilbert dined at his Club. When he got home it was eleven o'clock. As he went to bed, he thought he heard Anne moving about overhead in the nursery, but he did not go upstairs to speak to her. He was still angry and irritated, and he didn't know what he was going to say to her, especially if she were in a bad temper too, as she probably would be.

He slept late and heavily after the sleepless night before in the train, and when he came down to breakfast at nine-thirty he was confronted by the nurse, who informed him that Anne had taken Phil to the seaside by the early train, and given her a holiday.

Gilbert divined that Anne was offended, and decided to give her a week in which to recover her temper before he communicated with her in any way. She had put him in a difficult position. He didn't know what he was going to do about Sir Bradley Musgrave. He needed time to consider what would be the easiest course for him to pursue. The only axiom he felt quite sure of was that women had no principles. Laura Blake had proved that to his dis-

satisfaction on the yachting cruise : because he had a sense of honour and would not gratify her vanity by flagrant disloyalty to Anne, and incidentally to his host as well, she had outraged his sense of dignity by treating him with subtle disdain, and cultivating, with mortifying fervour, the society of another member of the party, a good-looking young attaché from the Italian Embassy. He had not enjoyed the experience of playing second fiddle to a "manicured foreign puppy." He was irritated whenever he remembered him. Only at Oban, when he had communicated the bad news he had found awaiting him, did Laura Blake suddenly relent and give him the sympathy he was accustomed to receive from her : and then his thoughts had been too full of Anne for him to appreciate it.

He spent a psychologically uncomfortable week. Anne's behaviour rankled. He was furious whenever he considered it afresh ; he had done well to be displeased with her. Yet whenever he recollected his anger, that rankled too. He had perhaps expressed himself harshly, and as he prided himself upon invariably behaving well, Anne became a fresh source of irritation and discomfort as the cause of his having behaved, if not badly, at least with less than his customary coolness and tact. At the end of a week he was still undecided what line of action to take regarding Sir Bradley Musgrave, so the easiest thing for him to do was to do nothing. As for Anne, he supposed it was about time he forgave her. He hated writing letters : he would go down and see her, and when he met her he would kiss her as though nothing had happened, and tell her not to be such a little fool again.

He sent a telegram to announce his purpose and the hour of his train's arrival, three p.m. He half expected her to be at the station with Phil ; but the only sign of life on the platform was a bored porter and the stationmaster's turkeys, who were scratching up a bed of petunias. The station was an irrelevant incident in an uninteresting landscape. It might have been dropped at random from an airship, it seemed to be so aimlessly marooned in the centre of a circle of flat green pasture land. There was no sign of the sea or a village. He was compelled, much against his principles and inclination, to question the porter, and learnt to his disgust that he had three miles to walk. He left his bag at the station.

A straight, dusty, shadeless road bisected the common, but as he came near the sea a refreshing salt breeze met him. The common ended in a soft carpet of sandy turf patterned with flowers in patches of colour—restharrow, feathery yellow bedstraw, mauve scabious ; and beyond the wild-flowered short turf was a line of sand-dunes covered with coarse ribbon grass, silvery sea-holly, and tufts of yellow poppies with horn-like seed pods. Then came the wide wet beach and the sea, as blue as delphiniums, marked with tide lines of jade green. There was a coast-guard station on the dunes, a little group of grey stone cottages, as neat and clean as a toy from a shop-window, and near the coastguard station, among the dunes and facing the sea, a few small wooden bungalows. Gilbert walked towards them, and a brown, bare-legged little urchin ran to meet him, shouting "Daddy"—Phil, sunburnt and rosy, and very wet and salt and sandy, as Gilbert discovered when he kissed him. And Samuel was wet

and salt and sandy too, and wanted to lie down on his boots. Both Phil and Samuel were glad to see him, and anxious to guide him to the right bungalow. In the shade of the smallest, sitting on the powdery dry sand of the dunes, were Anne and Marian. Marian was sketching the brown wet beach. Anne was reading; she raised her eyes when he came up to them and fixed them on the horizon. Marian greeted him hospitably; Anne did not speak until he said, "You got my telegram?"

"Oh yes," she replied with the polite air of one newly introduced to a stranger. "Where are you staying?"

"I'm so sorry my bungalow is so tiny," Marian said hastily. "Look at it!"

"I'm returning to London to-night," Gilbert said.

"I'll go in and see about tea," said Marian with tact. "You must be thirsty after that walk across the common."

"I'll come and help you," said Anne, and she jumped up and preceded Marian into the bungalow. Gilbert was left with Phil and Samuel. They were both anxious to entertain him. The tide was out, and Phil wished to go down to the reef of low rocks; he drew an alluring picture of the green crabs that inhabited the pools among the seaweed. Gilbert had not come all the way from London to pursue small green crabs that evaded capture as successfully as Anne was avoiding conversation. But Phil took undisputed possession of him, and chattered unrebuked all through tea, which would otherwise have been a failure as a social function. Anne was silent, and Marian started topics of conversation with the self-conscious care of a burglar striking matches in

a powder magazine. After tea Gilbert addressed Anne again.

"When are you coming home?" he asked.

"I'll let you know," was the reply, and again Marian rescued him with:

"Let them stay as long as they're not bored and this weather lasts. They both look so much better already."

When it became time for him to start on his walk back to the station for the London train, he said:

"Walk a little way with me, Anne."

"I'd rather not. I'm tired."

They were on the sands outside the bungalow, and Marian disappeared round it, leaving them alone together as she had tried to do before, only Anne had followed her as closely as Samuel followed Phil.

"But I've not had a word with you. I want to talk to you."

"I don't want to talk or be talked to." She moved away from him, and he shrugged his shoulders and left her.

He walked back over the common fuming with rage. He had expected Anne to fall into his arms. He had gone down with the most virtuous intention of conferring his forgiveness upon her, and it was humiliating to return with his offer not only unaccepted, but the very need for its existence ignored. If Anne chose to behave like a naughty, spoilt child he resolved to treat her with appropriate dignity. He faced the setting sun which was disappearing under the horizon behind a group of pine trees in a glory of dazzling clouds—little pink clouds floating like the feathers from some wonderful unknown bird

on a calm stream of golden light. As the sun sank, the western light gathered more colour, and the whole wide, quiet world seemed to be encircled by silent fire, a crucible in a furnace. The little feathery clouds glowed crimson like flames. The wet brown swampy creek on the common caught the light, and the dull mud became as burnished metal; it held the light, and reflected it like a copper prism, breaking it into innumerable shades of primitive colours, blending them into a fantastic pool of radiance. The beauty of the scene did not soothe Gilbert. The sun went down upon his wrath.

When the peaceful world was irradiated by a sunset glow that changed the sea into a lake of molten amethyst, Marian lit a cigarette and contemplated her guest's profile. Phil was in bed, and she and Anne were sitting on the sand-dunes. Anne played idly with the fine soft sand, letting it run through her fingers like dry water while she gazed with a rapt expression at the purple lights on the sea. It occurred to Marian that she was looking rather proud of herself. Marian wondered why.

Anne had dreaded the meeting with Gilbert: she was so afraid that the fire of outraged pride and hate and anger that possessed her soul and enabled her to behave with courage might die down, and leave her in a cold darkness that she was afraid to face. She had fed the fire with every scrap of fuel she could ransack from the storehouse of her memory. Every hasty word Gilbert had ever said, every selfish thing he had ever done, every occasion when he had failed to reach her standard of perfection, she had laid hands on and threw to the flames. And when that supply threatened to run short she

went gleaning for sticks in the forest of her imagination. She made herself very angry by inventing unkind, contemptuous criticisms of herself and attributing them to Gilbert. It was a dreary, painful pastime.

Marian privately thought that Gilbert had come a very long way for very little reward : she wished the coexistence of delicacy and curiosity were impossible ; as it was, she was possessed by both, and her curiosity had to go hungry. If Marian had questioned her, Anne might have told her the truth, and might have accepted good advice. But she was too shy to give unsought confidence. Instead, she watched the narrowing pathway of moonlight on the sea as the full moon rose, and remarked :

“ Poëts are quite wrong when they write about the golden sunlight on the water and the silver light of the moon. Moonlight on the water is yellow and gold, and the light of the sun is white and silver.”

“ I dare say quite respectable poets can be colour-blind,” said Marian. “ Do you remember Matthew Arnold’s ‘ Ode to the Nightingale ’ ? He calls it ‘ tawny-throated ’ ; now, if the man had ever set eyes on a nightingale he’d have known that the bird’s throat is grey—the rest of it is tawny if he likes. ‘ Tawny-coated ’ would have been accurate, and would have scanned just as well.”

“ It wouldn’t have had the same effect,” Anne declared. “ The throat is the nightingale’s strong point, and tawny in connection with a throat suggests port to lots of people. I daresay that was what was in his mind.”

“ That the bird sings as if it were drunk with new wine ? An ingenious mind like yours is wasted in a

sane domestic household. You ought to take up the higher criticism."

"John Halliday says I've no critical faculty."

"You don't need one for the higher branch of the science—that must be the joy of it. You merely need an ingenious mind. You just assume that the author you're criticising didn't mean what his words imply, but that he meant something you'd have meant if you'd been as great a fool as you imagine he must have been. Needless to say you choose a dead author. Another variety of the game is to assert that your author never existed. You give some excellent reasons why he ought not to have existed at the moment, and leave the burden of proving his existence on the orthodox admirers of his works. Of course in this case you must choose an author who has been dead for a really considerable time. The odds are that the orthodox admirers of his works won't be prepared to spend the rest of their lives in archæological research, and you win the first rubber. By the time anyone is in a position to contradict you, you're probably dead and past minding."

"Do you think that when one is dead one is past minding?" Anne asked with wistful eyes.

"I was brought up to believe not," Marian replied. "I lived in the hope that I was deceived for some years; now, on the whole, a future existence in which I should paint better than I'm ever really likely to do in this one has a great charm for me. Perhaps dead painters who've honestly done their best are allowed to dip celestial brushes in the sunset and decorate the sea."

"I shall never paint in this existence or any other," Anne said sadly.

"Landscape evidently isn't your *métier*. But I saw some little coloured sketches in your book that seemed to me very clever."

"Those were only little things I painted to amuse Phil when he was ill: they didn't amuse him in the least."

"Let me see them." She held out her hand for the sketch-book, and turned over the pages by the bright light of the moon till she came to the creatures of Anne's brain, whimsical, dainty beings, neither human nor faery, wearing quaint bright garments. They were drawn and coloured with something of the meticulous realism of old Chinese paintings.

"Did you copy these?"

"Oh no, just made them up out of my head."

"Well, they're jolly good in their own queer way," said Marian. "They're so gay and original. Of course, if this is your line of country, Tindale's studio was the wrong school for you. Who put you there?"

"I just put myself there."

"It's a pity you can't just put yourself in Paris with me this winter and study under Martin." Marian spoke regretfully, and was startled by the response the idle words evoked. Anne's eyes lit up with a dancing, sparkling flash of pleasure and excitement.

"Perhaps I will," she said. "That's a splendid idea!"

"What would your husband say?"

"I don't know." Anne's voice was unnaturally indifferent.

"He might object?"

"He might!" said Anne hopefully.

Gilbert dined on the train, and reached home at

ten o'clock. As he let himself in with his latchkey the telephone bell rang. It was Laura Blake, ringing up to enquire after Phil.

"I'm only just back," she explained. "Don't you think it very charming of me to give you my first thoughts?"

"Charming of you! The little chap is splendid, at the seaside. I've just been down to see him."

"What a devoted parent you are!" There was a slight hint of mockery in her voice: she contrived to insinuate that though concern for a sick child was permissible, there was something bourgeois, Philistine, and commonplace in a man who could be interested in a healthy child at the seaside. Gilbert's vanity felt the suggestion as a tiny midge bite on a tender skin, just something to be brushed away.

"His mother is with him," he said casually: he said "his mother" instead of "Anne" to shake himself free from the odour of domesticity—it removed Phil from his lofty, intellectual, masculine sphere.

"Then you're alone," came next, and the vibration of the telephone wire seemed to accentuate the sympathy in her voice.

"Yes, 'alone in London.'"

"So am I. Why don't you come and see me?"

"I want to. When shall I find you?"

"I mean now."

"Not too late for you?"

"Late? It is not half-past ten."

The delicate tone of surprise again imputed conventionality to him. In one of their conversations on the yacht they had agreed that conventionality

was the curse of life. They were both sincere ; for to Laura Blake conventionality meant morality, and she was not moral : and to Gilbert the word was synonymous with artificiality, and he was not artificial. They were both thoroughly conventional.

He would not have chosen that hour to call at Grosvenor Street. He was tired. But he felt he owed it to his late hostess ; besides, he was sore from his encounter with Anne, and welcomed the prospect of being soothed into complacency. In Laura Blake's company he found it easy to contemplate Anne from a lofty distance of toleration. Laura Blake was very clever : she had not those rare qualities of intellect or temperament or vitality that inspire a grateful contemporary society to bestow the title of " genius " in recognition of the humbler demands on life of mediocrity ; but she coveted the privileges that went with the title so intently that she cultivated the pose with amazing success. It is easy for a pretender to usurp the minor prerogatives of royalty where the subjects are unable to discern the imposture, in territory the rightful overlords would not trouble to conquer.

She spoke, and acted, and lived, on the hypothesis that she and all those whom she honoured with her friendship were above all restrictions imposed by the bonds of virtues and considerations that applied only to mortals lacking some vague hall-mark of superiority that she had never deigned to define. She despised her husband and all gross sinners who yielded weakly to the temptations of passionate humanity ; but she performed some strange mental ritual whereby facts underwent a strange metempsychosis, and emerged clothed in different and purified words.

What, in an unrarefied atmosphere, might be called sinful, or vicious, or ugly by a plebeian vocabulary became, after treatment, free, or beautiful, or simple. She didn't say an ugly book was beautiful, she called it clever. If a man she admired deserted his wife and child to enjoy life with someone he found more attractive, Lady Blake would not say it was kind or virtuous behaviour, she would condone it by calling him wise. She sneered at decency by calling the austere virtues banal, and she connived at evil by labelling the vices that appealed to her "interesting" or "original."

This evening when Gilbert arrived she welcomed him with an animation that flattered him, for she was generally languorous. She was looking unusually handsome clothed in purple and silver.

"How nice to see you again," she said as he was ushered into her drawing-room. She held out both her hands, and as the door closed behind the manservant, she looked intently up into Gilbert's face, and said coolly, "You may kiss me if you like."

Gilbert did like: and she carried off the situation gracefully. Her audacity amused Gilbert and infected him. Her recklessness communicated itself to him. After all, he argued, when a beautiful woman throws herself at a man's head, what can a man do but accept her at her own valuation?

CHAPTER XV

LAWRENCE ACKROYD returned to London from the Pyrenees at the end of September, and, with a reluctance born of wide vistas in clear air, he resumed work in his chambers in Crown Court. London is not at its best at the close of a fine hot summer; the trees are dry-leaved and dusty; the soft wet mist that loves and lingers in the streets for so many months, softening the harsh perspective, and creating lovely mysterious blue distances out of unpromising material, cannot contend with the bright yellow light of the sun that is ripening northern harvest fields. London has very little share of the beauties of autumn. In the Temple the grass was brown and the giant plane trees were shedding too many leaves. There was no high-spirited wind to play with them and give them one rollicking taste of freedom before they died; they just drifted down and lay flat in the dust, looking tired and disappointed; and the air was redolent of some innocuous disinfectant with which credulous municipal authorities had been watering the streets.

The documents awaiting examination lay on his writing-table, each tied up neatly with pink tape. He was briefed to defend a blackmailer, a shipping company whose vessel had collided with and damaged one of His Majesty's torpedo-boats, and a guileless

undergraduate who had eloped with a ward in Chancery: to prosecute a building company for the infringements of Ancient Lights, the curator of a provincial museum for selling an Egyptian mummy and appropriating the cash, and the proprietors and editor of a weekly organ of public opinion in whose pages the truth about a popular Labour leader had inadvertently been published. By some strange alchemy, out of the base metals of human error and weakness and crime, the gold of human justice was transmuted, alloyed with strange stuff, fluxed with human tears, but true gold in the end—that was Lawrence Ackroyd's ultimate faith in the spirit and tradition that dwelt in the Temples from generation to generation, that moved upon the troubled waters of humanity surging through the channel of the Law Courts where his life's work was anchored.

He decided to allow himself a day's respite. He rang up Anne Trevor and asked her to go with him to a *matinée*. She was just home, she said over the telephone, and alone. Gilbert was down at Crane Hall having a new roof put on the house; she would be delighted to come to the theatre. He took seats for a new play by Pinero, and looked forward with pleasure to telling Anne the most entertaining incidents of his adventures in Spain; she was so pretty when she laughed, and when she was interested she listened as an enthralled child listens to a fairy story. So many women interrupted, asked silly questions, or wanted to narrate their own experiences.

The play was a success. He was lucky enough to get good stalls; Anne looked charming, and enjoyed the performance. Afterwards they went to have

tea. He suggested his Club, but she wished to go to a new tea-room which she declared was the smartest place in London.

It was a little late when they found the place. It was half empty. They chose a table by an open window, and he was amused by Anne's impartial appreciation of his conversation and the varieties of sweet cakes provided by the establishment. Before they had finished tea the adjacent table immediately behind them was taken by two women who had also been to a *matinée*. He noticed them as they came in, and reflected that, compared with Anne, other women's voices were too loud and their clothes of an exaggerated fashion. He continued the anecdote he was relating, but every word the two strangers uttered was audible. Presently—

"Have you seen the Blakes lately?" one woman enquired. Her companion replied: "I was lunching with Laura on Sunday. Charles was away for the week-end."

"I know, and I know where he was too. However, it is lucky for her he's so fast himself. She knows he can never divorce her. He'd never get a decree with his record behind him."

Lawrence Ackroyd fidgeted. It was distasteful to him that Anne should overhear the conversation; if she had finished tea he would have made an excuse for getting her away, but she hadn't finished; she had just taken a pink iced cake and was urging him to have one too.

"They're awfully good," she said. "They've got chocolate and jam inside."

"I'm much too old! I can only enjoy them vicariously by seeing you tackle anything so horribly

indigestible." He raised his voice so that the two strangers might realise that their conversation was overheard, but they were garbed in some impervious armour of egotism, and were supremely indifferent as to whether they were overheard or not. Worse followed; though he made a desperate attempt to drown their words it was futile.

"Who's Laura's latest captive?" came later.

"Don't you know? It's that good-looking youngish man she's been running after for months, Gilbert Trevor. Jack met them at Maidenhead together, of all places! He says I'm to cut her, so silly you know—as if one could!"

Lawrence sat there paralysed into silence, internally cursing all women who gossiped, especially all women who gossiped in tea-shops, and the two unknown women in particular: then he cursed himself for bringing Anne to the place, and for having been unable to shield her; before he had time to curse Gilbert, he had to make an effort to adjust the situation. Anne had turned very red, and then very, very white, and she laid the pink cake down on her plate.

"What insufferable women!" he exclaimed. "What utterly abominable behaviour. . . . My dear," his voice changed, "you mustn't allow yourself to be hurt by a chance lie from ill-natured, ill-bred scandalmongers."

Anne crumbled the pink cake with trembling fingers, and glanced up at him with a pitiful bewildered hesitation, almost like a child confronted with an unconceived-of situation searching for guidance from an elder guardian. She had had a great shock, but the expression in Lawrence

Ackroyd's eyes roused her to exert herself to decide how to take it. He looked so sorry that she knew he believed that the truth had been spoken, and she could not bear to be pitied. He said something wise and kind but she didn't listen. She drank some tea hastily because something was throbbing in her throat, preventing her speaking, and she had to speak.

At last she half whispered :

"You won't tell anyone, will you? I think I'll go home now." He was about to say something but she stopped him. "I'm stupid now—I can't talk. My head aches I think."

She was evidently suffering. His heart ached for her, but he could do nothing to help her at the moment. The mixture of dignity and ingenuousness with which she was bearing herself made it impossible for him to guess whether sympathy or unconcern would be the most judicious covering in which to convey his conviction that the strangers had grossly libelled Gilbert and Lady Blake. He had no such conviction, but it was his intention to manufacture one and present it to Anne with all the dialectic skill at his command.

"When shall I see you again?" he asked as he followed her down the stairs.

"May I come and see you to-morrow?"

"I wish you would." They were in Bond Street and there was nothing to be done but put her into a taxi and make an appointment for the next day.

She arrived at Crown Court the following afternoon, and when she came into his austere gloomy room she brought with her the effect of a nosegay of fresh flowers; but in spite of her pretty clothes she

looked wretched. She bore herself with a gallant but artificial air of assurance, for all the world, he thought, like Phil when he had done something reprehensible and had made up his young mind to betray neither contrition nor anxiety. But behind her defiant little smile of bravado there was a piteous quivering anguish she could not entirely conceal. He intuitively discerned that it would be merciful to pretend to be unobservant. He installed her in his deep leather arm-chair and sat at his writing-table.

"I've come to ask your advice," she said nervously.

"I hoped you had." He fixed his eyeglass in his eye and leant back with his elbows on the wooden arms of his chair and his finger-tips together. Then she nearly startled him out of his studied air of professional detachment.

"It is about divorcing Gilbert," she said in a low hurried voice as if she were ashamed of the law books on the walls overhearing her.

"Mrs. Trevor," he said gravely, "surely you don't mean to say you're judging and condemning your husband on the careless word of a very thoughtless stranger. Believe me, I'm speaking as a counsel with twenty years' experience. Put it out of your mind."

"I can't," said Anne, "because it is true. I knew it before."

"You knew?"

"Yes."

Then to his intense distress her lips quivered, and she broke down into a passion of tears. He knelt by her chair and, for the first and only time in his

life, he wished he were a woman so that he could take her in his arms and try to comfort her. All he could do was to stammer helplessly :

“I can’t bear to see you cry. My dear, I can’t bear you to cry so.”

She wept like a broken-hearted child for a few minutes, then, with a strong effort of self-control, she stopped herself. He walked away to the window to give her time to recover her self-possession. While he stood there waiting he became conscious that, although his mind had been assiduously preparing a plausible presentation of a case that should restore to Anne her faith in her husband’s integrity, his imagination had been otherwise employed. He was confronted with the alternative of doing precisely the opposite, of assuming the worst, playing authoritatively for his own hand and his own heart, trying to set Anne free from her husband who had proved unworthy of her, in order to marry her himself. He knew now that he adored her, that he would never love anyone else. If she were free he could win her. It was a sudden and a strong temptation. He felt it was in his power to succeed ; it was, at any rate, in his power to try. He faced and fought the attraction of the idea for a few long difficult seconds ; then he broke the spell with an effort. Anne had come to him for help : he knew he could not look into her very candid, clear, childlike eyes and advise her basely. As he waited while she dried her eyes he swept the sympathy that welled up from his sensitive and tender heart away into the cells where it came from, locked it in and dropped the key. She needed the help of his brain, not his emotions. He marshalled his thoughts and his keen intellect in the spirit with

which a knight in the days of chivalry, suddenly summoned to enter the lists, would have struggled into his armour. When he returned to his chair and spoke, his voice was quite impersonal.

"Now tell me what your trouble is. Remember you're speaking in absolute confidence to a hardened King's Counsel who has seen more sin and misery and unhappiness than you have ever dreamed of. Nothing you tell me will either surprise or shock me. I'm too old a hand. Don't hesitate to tell me anything from mistaken motives of loyalty. A nice woman's general instinct is to suppress something that has appalled her. It will not appal me."

Anne looked past his head at the open window and told him, in a steady voice, precisely as much as she had intended to tell him.

"Gilbert and I quarrelled in August. He was very unjust to me, and I was angry. I was perfectly right to be angry. He was absolutely in the wrong, and said things I shall never forgive . . ."

"One moment. He spoke to you in anger?"

"Yes, and he'd no business to be angry."

"What was the origin of the quarrel?"

Anne flushed, her lips quivered, and she remained silent.

"Very well. I won't press it."

"We didn't quarrel about—anybody. I never thought of not trusting him. . . . Then I took Phil to the seaside; it was just after his operation you know. Then I went to stay with my sister-in-law. Gilbert was in London. I came back last week and then he'd gone to Norfolk. He never wrote or cared that we'd quarrelled. Our marriage was a mistake. I realise that now."

He hesitated. She was evidently keeping back as much as she could: he was quite used to that, nice women were usually very bad witnesses. Yet it was evidently costing her so much to divulge as much of the case as she had done that he decided to spare her the examination she shrank from.

"I won't preach to you," he said cautiously. "And it takes two people to hallow forgiveness, so I won't urge you to forgive your husband, if he hasn't sought forgiveness."

"It would be no use," said Anne with some spirit.

"Very well. And you've thought of the child?"

"Yes. Of course I should have Phil."

"Very well. We start upon the supposition that you've discovered that your marriage was a mistake, and that the discovery has destroyed your happiness. That is a tragedy, and you are sensitive, capable of suffering. I hoped life would deal very gently with you. Apparently it isn't doing so. But you've courage, you're not afraid to face things, and courage is given us not only to face things, but to go through with them. If you've made a mistake, mistakes have to be paid for. Somebody has to pay. It is honest to pay for one's mistakes oneself, otherwise someone else has to. That is elementary science and morality, but it is surprising how few people recognise it as an inevitable law. Nowadays society devotes much of its intellect and energy into trying to make the elementary virtues superfluous. Luckily we can't do it. But we've invented the Divorce Court. People who've given drafts on life they're not prepared to honour are provided with a way out. They can cut their loss, go through the matrimonial bank-

ruptcy court. Part of the penalty is shifted on to the children's shoulders. The child pays part of the price for the parents' mistake. He is deprived either of part of his rightful inheritance, pride in his father's name, or given a lower ideal of virtue and conduct than happier children."

"Then you think I needn't divorce Gilbert?" she said, and to his surprise there was relief in her voice.

"Divorce isn't compulsory in this country yet, thank God. I'm afraid I don't quite understand. You don't want a divorce?"

"No, I don't," she said in a shamed voice. "Unless you think I ought to?"

"I think you ought to?"

"I was afraid you'd despise me if I didn't—that people might have contempt for me. . . ." She rose and half turned away.

"I despise you for being magnanimous, and generous, and loyal!" He took her hand and lifted it to his lips.

"I'm not," she said quickly; "don't praise me. It is merely that I don't want anyone to know; not even Juliet. I don't want anyone to know or to pity me. I should hate it."

"Don't depreciate yourself by invoking a poor motive for a fine course of action. And believe me, I've seen more of life than you have. It will all come right. Men are curiously composite creatures. Your husband may be estranged for the moment, but it won't last."

"Yes, it will," said Anne obstinately. "*I'm* estranged now. Our marriage was all a mistake."

He said to himself that she had pride as well as

courage to carry her through. She pulled down her veil, collected her little possessions—her gloves, her damp ball of a cambric handkerchief, and her purse. He walked with her into Fleet Street and hailed her a cab.

“Where shall I tell him to drive you?”

“To Cumberland Market, Camden Town. I’m going to see John Halliday. And thank you so much.”

He repeated the address, and walked back down Middle Temple Lane with mixed feelings. His devotion to her was exalted by the interview; but he would have been better pleased if she had not thought it necessary to ask him not to tell Juliet; and if he could have felt he was her only masculine friend, instead of her having reminded him of the existence of John Halliday. He assured himself that such hypersensitiveness was sentimental and not to be fostered. He returned to his work, and looked up precedents for disputes between the Lords of the Admiralty and Captains of the Mercantile Marine, and Anne’s blue eyes haunted the pages he turned.

CHAPTER XVI

ANNE arrived at the printing works in Camden Town at John's busiest hour. He was dictating letters to his shorthand-typist. The girl, Molly Campbell, was the daughter of the manager, and had been recently promoted from less important work in her father's office. The honour of her upward step in life had brought her what such honours do not always bring, more amusement. Mr. Halliday had an ingratiating way of taking her into his confidence during the composition of business missives : would hesitate between two choice phrases of invective or politeness, and ask her which she considered to be the more ferocious, or conciliating. He was a more human taskmaster than her father. He admired the speed with which she followed his dictation, and the skill which enabled her to decipher the mysterious symbols inscribed in the pages of her shorthand notebook. Her father merely grunted when her work or conduct was meritorious ; when it wasn't, he reminded her grimly that he had paid as much as six guineas for the completion of her education at a Commercial College, that he would stand no nonsense, and that he would show her the folly of expecting any human being to have patience with her. She respected her father's judgment, and his temper, and everything that was his, but

she preferred working for John. And when the door of the dingy office opened and Anne walked in, she felt she was really seeing life. Her round brown eyes opened almost as wide as the door. Young ladies dressed in delicious clothes were astonishing apparitions in the printing works at Camden Town. The rapturous alacrity with which John leapt to his feet and welcomed his visitor was not so astonishing.

"Anne!" he exclaimed joyfully. Then he hurriedly dismissed Molly with: "Thanks awfully, Miss Campbell. That will do for just now."

Nineteen-year-old Molly went reluctantly, she would have liked another lingering glance at Anne—at the wreath of blue flowers on her hat, her fine filmy veil, her cream chiffon blouse, the string of green jade beads round her pretty neck, the dark blue silk coat and skirt, her grey silk stockings and grey suède buckled shoes, her white gloves. Molly noted all this in the few seconds that elapsed between Anne's entrance and her own exit; yet Molly's own father said she was unobservant.

John put his own chair for Anne and sat on the table, grinning at her ecstatically.

"This is simply ripping of you, Anne! When did you get back? And how's Phil?"

"He's splendid, and I got back a day or two ago. Did you have a nice holiday?"

"Yes, thanks. I went to St. Hilda's Bay to our old rooms at Mrs. Mugford's. Had some jolly walks on the moors. The old woman's just the same, poor old dame. I showed her that photograph of you and Phil and she said: 'Ain't he the spitting image of his mother, the pretty lamb!' Somehow the

juxtaposition of 'spitting' and 'lamb' seemed to hit Phil off perfectly ! She sent you her best respects and asked whether you'd still got your lovely head of hair, and wondered whether you still hated having it washed ! I explained that it hardly came within my province to enquire nowadays."

Anne laughed with wistful lips.

"They were jolly days," she said.

"They were ! It brought it all back. Nothing has changed, except that they've built a brand new hotel on the west cliff, and some hideous little red-brick villas all up the hill on the south side of the harbour, the nice hill that was covered with bracken. By the way, have you had tea ? "

"No. Are you going to give me some ? "

"I'm afraid there isn't a very nice place about here. If I'd only known you were coming ! " He opened the door, and shouted up the stairs. "I say, Miss Campbell, do you think you could be a brick and produce a cup of tea for Mrs. Trevor ?—I know those girls have some," he explained.

Molly Campbell would have been willing to brew mead or hippocras if she had ever heard of such beverages, and if their concoction would have given her a second glimpse of Anne. She came shyly into the room with a brown teapot, a thick pink-rimmed cup and saucer, milk in a glass jug, and a plate full of biscuits. She arranged them with slow particularity on the table, and stole soul-satisfying glances at Anne.

"What a pretty girl that is," Anne remarked when Molly had unwillingly gone away again.

"Is she ? " said John, bent on extricating a fly from the milk-jug with a pencil. Molly had black

hair, dark eyes, and a pale brown face : his ideas of beauty included blue eyes, pale gold hair, and a fair complexion. Privately he thought Molly insignificant.

"She's very good. Give me a girl for a secretary any day. They don't come to the office in the morning with their hand shaking because they've been drunk the night before, and they don't want to borrow their lunch money from the petty cash the day after the Grand National, nor lose relations at inconvenient days when there are cheap excursions to Epsom or Kempton Park. Is the tea all right ? "

She was stirring hers slowly, apparently as much absorbed in the operation as if she believed that by stirring it assiduously she could change Ceylon into China tea and was determined to do it. She was thinking. She had one strong motive for not letting John know that anything was the matter—her own pride ; but now she bethought herself of another ; to know of her unhappiness would make him miserable. Pride buttressed by unselfishness is an unimpregnable defence when the citadel is a resolution and its garrison a woman. She smiled at him at last with a guileless smile that would have deceived a more suspicious man than her host was.

"I've come partly on business," she said. "You're my trustee, and I want some of my money, some of the capital—two or three hundred pounds at least."

John pushed his cup away and took a biscuit to give himself time to consider this.

"I don't think your trustees ought to let you dip into your capital. What does Gilbert say ? "

"I've not told him yet. He won't say anything if you agree."

"I don't think we ought to touch your capital. It's all you've got you know, and it isn't much."

"I know, that's exactly it. I want to make some more."

"Really you know—if you want to play about with it I won't agree to you having a penny, and I'm quite sure Gilbert won't."

"It is my money after all."

"Yes, and it's our duty to see that it remains yours. Your father lost all you ought to have had. He gambled with it, threw it away."

"You don't think I want to gamble with it, do you?"

"No—don't get rusty, Anne! But I suppose you want to speculate with it. You say you want to make some more?"

"Of course I want to make more, one hundred and five pounds a year is only twenty-six pounds every three months."

John looked worried. Had Anne got into debt?

"Of course I know it isn't my business to ask what you want it for. . . ."

"I'll tell you," she said eagerly, "only it is a secret at present. I want to go to Paris."

"Make Gilbert take you."

"I don't want to go with Gilbert. I want to go by myself and stay all the winter, and study painting."

"But what for?"

"Because I want to. Oh, John! Now I've told you, you might help me!"

"How can I? You're a perfect babe if you think a trustee is a sort of money-box. It would be awfully wrong of me, Anne."

She was silent with the displeased certainty that John wouldn't give in if he had conceived the notion that it would be wrong if he did. He was silent because the glamour of pure joy had vanished from the little office : he had refused Anne something and she was vexed, on the point of quarrelling with him. He could think of nothing to say.

"Never mind," she remarked at last, quite cheerfully. John couldn't be sure whether the expression was to be taken as a threat or an olive branch. They chatted happily enough till she rose to go. Her last words were : "I shall get the money and I shall go to Paris."

She did.

She sold her jewellery, sent a telegram to Francesca asking her to keep an eye on Phil, and joined Marian Wyndham at Dover the day before Gilbert was returning to London from Norfolk.

Marian was glad to see her. She was erratic herself, and had a kindred feeling for Anne which had mingled with solicitude for her and become affection. She admired Anne ; admired her prettiness and grace, she herself being gaunt and ungraceful, and she admired her pluck which she recognised and understood. But there was something else she recognised and did not understand as they stood on deck together watching the Dover cliffs extend horizontally as the steamer raced away from them.

"You know this is very jolly, Anne Trevor," she said as she lit her inevitable cigarette. "But I feel as if I were kidnapping. I don't say that doesn't add to the jollity, but I'd like to know where I am. What line do I take when your infuriated husband tracks you to my flat and asks me what the devil

I mean by enticing you away? What the devil *do* I mean?"

"I'm twenty-four," said Anne.

"Are you? Well you don't look it. You look seventeen, and you are a baby you know."

"I don't feel it," Anne said passionately; her underlip trembled, and she turned away and leant on the rail with her eyes on the horizon.

Marian threw her cigarette in the sea and leant on the rail beside her.

"What's wrong, my dear? Of course you needn't tell me if you don't want to, but a blind woman could see that something was the matter. Don't answer if you'd rather not, and I won't ask any more."

"I've quarrelled with my husband. He—he . . ."

"He's like other men I suppose," said Marian gently, with an undercurrent of bitterness in her voice. "And you've just found it out and it hurts like sin. I know."

"Our marriage was a mistake," said Anne mechanically. She found that a helpful formula, it covered both her pride and her innate loyalty to Gilbert.

"Most marriages are, it seems to me," said Marian. "I dare say you're very sensible to come away for a bit. The only cures for trouble in this world are work and beauty. I don't think we are really properly grateful for either." She watched Anne's pathetically tragic little face for a moment, and then fixed her eyes on the north where the blue sea ended in a dark horizon against the pale sky. "Have you ever thought what a very mysterious thing the horizon at sea is?" she asked. "The line of it I mean? Any section of it is as straight as a stretched bow-

string, yet the whole is a perfect circle. It is the demonstration of the perfection of the definition of a straight line as 'part of the circumference of a circle whose centre is at infinity.' It always comforts me. It seems to prove that infinity is in ourselves."

Anne was not ready to be comforted by any philosophical wisdom : but she was grateful to Marian for being unemotional and unhuman. She could not have borne any conventional sympathy or advice. She was as forlorn and desolate as a shipwrecked child, and, like a child, she yielded to the healthy instincts of youth, shrank from morbid dwelling on the catastrophe, and became engrossed in the resultant adventure. For the first time in her life she was at liberty. She had left her responsibilities behind her ; there was nobody in authority over her with the right of educating or admonishing her, nobody to object to, or approve of, anything she chose to do or say or think. In her sore, rebellious mood Anne felt that approbation was as infuriating and as hampering as criticism. She didn't care whether the whole world was pleased with her or not : in fact she devoutly hoped that the presiding deity of her whole world, Gilbert, would be profoundly displeased.

Marian noticed that the wan misery on Anne's face was dispelled by the bustle and stir of their arrival at Calais, and by their journey through France. On her previous visits to Paris she had travelled conventionally with Gilbert. They had stayed at an ordinary hotel, and spent money in all the usual ways, seen Paris from the tower of superior aloofness of the upper class English tourist.

Marian's flat and mode of life provided a totally new experience: Paris was a different world. It was the difference between watching a play from the auditorium and being on the stage taking part in the pageant. Marian was amused and astonished by Anne's adaptability. She had been too good-natured to harbour misgivings when Anne had joined her, but she had the professional's distrust of the amateur worker, and a dread that Anne, with her daintiness, her fastidious ways, her spoilt child graces might be as out of place in her huggermugger existence as a humming-bird from an aviary among the sparrows on the house-tops. However, she recognised she was wrong. Anne adapted herself with a resilience and a whole-hearted enjoyment of new ways, strange food, and a fresh outlook, that marked her out as one of those joyous pilgrims on life's road who are good company in all weathers, who have the great gift of high courage and a light heart. It amused Anne to live on scanty meals in cheap restaurants and work hard among people who took art seriously and life flippantly. The gaiety, the irresponsibility, the hard work suited her.

To Marian's surprise some weeks passed and Gilbert Trevor made no sign of pursuing his errant wife. The simple explanation was that, though Anne had informed Francesca that she was going to Paris with Marian Wyndham, she had not stated her purpose of remaining there for months, and her family expected her return daily. Gilbert waited for three weeks, then he telegraphed to enquire when she was coming home. Anne read the telegram, raised her eyebrows, smiled enigmatically, and tore it up. As she didn't answer it Gilbert wired again,

peremptorily requesting her to return at once. And when this failed to elicit an answer he packed a bag and crossed over to Paris in a very bad temper.

Marian's flat was on the fifth floor of a narrow house in the Latin Quarter. On the morning he arrived he found nobody there. An untidy pale-faced Russian woman whom he met on the stairs informed him that the English women were out and would perhaps not be home until late that evening. Gilbert spent an unenjoyable day and returned at nine o'clock. The flat was still empty. He sat down on the stairs, lit a cigarette, and grimly prepared to wait until Anne did choose to return. While he waited he considered what he was going to say to her—the English language seemed an inadequate vehicle for his exasperation. He waited two hours, and by eleven o'clock he was so tired of waiting that he was almost prepared to forgive her, provided she came at once. At last he heard footsteps on the stairs, and when they drew near he struck a match, for the stairs were dark, and said: "Anne?"

But it was Marian, alone. She stared at him.

"Where's my wife?" he asked.

"Oh! It's you, is it?" said Marian calmly.

"Come in, won't you?"

She opened her door, lit a candle first and then a cigarette.

"Where's Anne?" he asked.

"She's all right. Thoroughly enjoying herself dancing. I couldn't get her away. Someone will bring her back when she's had enough of it."

"Dancing? Where?"

"At an American's studio. It is his birthday. There are about forty of them there of fourteen

nationalities. They've got a mad Hungarian violinist playing for them. They are all quite young, very wild, rather silly, and perfectly harmless. But they're having the time of their lives and Anne is the life of the party. She really dances divinely."

"I've come to fetch her home."

Marian blew smoke rings with half-shut eyes.

"Of course it isn't my business to advise you," she said. "But if I were you I'd let her stay here with me as long as she wants to."

"Perhaps you'll be kind enough to tell me," replied Gilbert stiffly, "how long that's likely to be?"

"She's very keen on painting," said Marian, feeling her way cautiously, "and she really has talent."

"She also has a husband, a child, and a home."

"Well, I'm not married, thank God," she said. "It is probably more suitable for me not to interfere. Have you been waiting long?"

"About two hours."

"We'll have something to eat. I don't know how late that child will be."

She lit an oil stove, and by the light of the one candle she found eggs and other accessories in obscure recesses of the room, and proceeded to make an omelette and some coffee. Gilbert was mollified by the fact that she was a good cook; he was hungry and grateful for the food. His embryonic confidence in Marian developed muscle and vitality and began to move. He offered her one of his cigarettes, and asked bluntly:

"What is the matter with Anne?"

"You're going to see her. She may tell you. On

the other hand she may not. I've not cross-questioned her myself. Speaking as an observer I should say you'd offended her, to put it mildly. Anyway I warn you she has set her heart on spending some months here."

"That is ridiculous of course."

"Well—is it? She is working hard, it may be the best thing for her. Anne is one of those people who can concentrate: you can only concentrate upon one thing at a time. At present it's her work. That will help her to get over—whatever there is for her to get over. Otherwise I fancy she'd be having a bad time."

Gilbert frowned nervously and uncomfortably.

"She'll come to no harm," said Marian. "She is a little young mad thing, but she has the most pellucid temperament."

A neighbouring church struck twelve. He fidgeted irritably. It occurred to him that it was totally unsuitable for a British husband to be spending midnight in a strange studio in Paris discussing his most intimate domestic affairs with a disconcertingly candid young woman he hardly knew, while his wife chose to pass the night dancing with people to whom he had not been introduced.

A door downstairs banged. Marian listened.

"There she is. Not late you see. We keep early hours in the morning here to make the most of the light."

Anne came in with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes. She adored dancing, and had spent a very gay and amusing evening. At Marian's greeting, "Here is your husband!" and at the sight of Gilbert, the excitement vanished. Her mouth set

into a queer little expression of hardness and contempt, and her eyes looked bright with an emotion that was not joy.

"I'm going to bed," said Marian abruptly. "Good night, you two."

She left them alone, and Anne remained silent, erect and motionless.

"Now what is the meaning of all this nonsense?" said Gilbert.

Anne didn't answer.

"Don't be a little fool, Anne! When are you coming back?"

"Never!"

"What do you mean?" He kept his voice calm: if they were going to quarrel he didn't wish Marian, in the next room, to overhear every word.

"I mean that I shall come back to Phil presently, when I've done what I want to do. I shall never come back to you."

"Why not? Look here, Anne, this won't do. If you've got a lot of exaggerated ideas in your head about anything . . . let's have it out. . . . I can explain . . ."

"I don't want you to explain anything, thank you. I don't care a bit."

"It is no use me staying here arguing with you in this mood!"

He picked up his hat and coat. "When you've made up your mind to be reasonable you can let me know."

"I can let you know now. I'm going to stay here for a month or two until I can make money by my painting. . . ."

"You're talking like a child. What am I to

say to people if you stay away for a month or two ? ”

“ Exactly what you like.”

“ And what do you want to make money for ? Money is my affair. Francesca will lend me enough to tide over emergencies.”

“ I want to be able to support myself and Phil if I ever decide to leave you and take him away.”

“ Don’t talk like a heroine in a third-rate problem play. Anyone would think I’d been a brute to you.”

It was Anne’s impulse to say, “ You’ve been very cruel ! ” but the words would not come. The strain of the quarrel was telling on her, she was tired, the tears were very near. She was having the opportunity she had wished for, the opportunity of retaliating upon Gilbert and punishing him : but to her incredulous bewilderment it was giving her very little satisfaction : instead, she seemed to be hurting herself more than she was hurting him. She was afraid if she uttered the words that were uppermost in her mind they would sound like a reproach, or an appeal for pity ; they would betray that she was wounded, and her pride would not admit that to him. She had to choose between a silence with tightened lips and words borne on a flood of tears. If she had spoken, and cried, Gilbert would have had the excuse he was yearning for, to take her in his arms and try to force a reconciliation upon her. She might have yielded if he had. But she made no sign, gave him no opening.

He walked to the door.

“ When you’ve come to your senses, let me know,” he said coldly. “ I go back to-morrow. If you choose to behave like a rational being and return with

me . . . ?" He looked at her hesitatingly : but she shook her head. Then he went away.

Marian heard him go, and she lay awake in the dark, listening intently to Anne's movements. She heard Anne throw herself on her bed, for it was a cheap, rickety little camp-bed and creaked betrayingly ; then she heard the muffled sound of half-suffocated sobs.

" Poor kid ! " she said to herself. She debated within herself whether she should go to Anne and try to comfort her ; but decided that it would be kinder to leave her alone. " She'd hate it, and she's got to go through with it. It will help her more if she thinks I believe she doesn't care : she wants to pretend she doesn't, and it will help her if she thinks she's convinced me."

CHAPTER XVII

THE story that Anne was run down after a hot summer and the worry of Phil's illness, and of, under doctor's orders, having a holiday in France travelling with an old friend, was plausible enough for general purposes. Francesca accepted it for three weeks; but when Gilbert returned from Paris without Anne her scepticism grew up to the clouds in a night like the beanstalk in the fairy tale; and, like the hero of that allegory, she followed it up to investigate the fearful giants of doubt it logically led to.

"When is Anne really coming back?" she enquired one evening after dinner. She was staying with her brother in London, thoroughly enjoying her vicarious maternal responsibilities.

"Write and ask her," he suggested. "She hasn't told me."

Francesca pondered over this reply.

"Gilbert—there's nothing the matter, is there?"

"I told you. I saw her, and she's looking much better."

"What is keeping her away then?"

"Her own sweet will."

"Have you two quarrelled?" she asked anxiously. He was disconcerted.

"She's a bad-tempered little devil," he declared.

"She's only a child, Gilbert."

"She's a very silly child."

"But, Gilbert, if she is still a spoilt child, remember you've spoilt her. It isn't fair to expect her to change and be a reasonable woman of the world in ten minutes merely because it would be more convenient if she were."

"The only thing to do when Anne sulks is to leave her alone till she leaves off." He waited a minute, and added, "It will be all right in time."

He really believed it would be, more or less. He was not sure about Anne. He thought her jealousy had been firing at random in the dark. He told himself she was a tiresome little spitfire, and that if she chose to create an impossible situation for him he had a legitimate grievance.

Francesca thought he was too casual. She was worried. She wrote to Anne carefully and tactfully. Anne, after ten days, replied with a brevity and an irrelevance that might have sprung either from consummate tact or imperturbable indifference. Francesca became seriously troubled, and decided to confide in John Halliday: he might be able to enlighten her on the subject of Anne's vagaries; he might even be able to influence the child. She invited him to dinner at her Club, and afterwards, when they were smoking cigarettes in the lounge, she asked him if he knew what was the matter with Anne.

"No! What *is* the matter?" He immediately took alarm, and, like a faithful watch-dog, he showed it by becoming angry.

"I'm afraid all isn't well. She and Gilbert have apparently had some disagreement, and Anne is in Paris and refuses to come home. Do you think you could persuade her that it is foolish of her to

stay away any longer? She really ought to come back."

John turned very red, and sat up straight in the deep arm-chair.

"If he's making her unhappy upon my soul I'll kill him!" he exclaimed with a vehemence that startled Francesca. "I'm sorry, Mrs. Waring. I forgot he's your brother. Of course you'd take his part, but you see Anne's happiness is all the world to me. I care about that more than about anything else. I see red when I think of anyone making her miserable."

"But," Francesca went on, "it may be Anne's fault. She isn't always reasonable. If she could be persuaded to come home. . . ."

"I don't care if it is Anne's fault," replied John. "And I don't believe it is. If a man isn't going to make a girl happy, he's no business to marry her. I should always take Anne's part: if she threw lighted lamps at Gilbert's head it would be his fault for making her do it."

Francesca sighed impatiently; by this time she was regretting that she had taken John into her confidence. She tried to mend matters. She was afraid she had given John a wrong impression, she said; he mustn't exaggerate her meaning. John hardly listened.

He brooded over the matter at leisure. If Anne was going to be one of those poor women who were ill-treated or deserted by their husbands it would be more than he could bear. Life wasn't a very gay business for him, and never had been, but at least all had gone well for Anne. She had been happy, and if he could ensure her happiness by such drastic

measures as shooting anyone whose conduct or existence threatened it, he should consider it, if not exactly a pleasure or a duty, at least a laudible activity.

He was sorry for all women : men made the world such a difficult and unhappy place for them. John tried to atone for the inherent cruelty of his sex by allotting an extra share of kindness to the only women with whom he was thrown in daily contact, his landlady, who was an elderly sufferer from chronic asthma, and Molly Campbell, whose father bullied her. It relieved his chivalrous feelings to be especially gentle and courteous to them, as he couldn't reach Anne, who was in Paris, and only answered his letters with an occasional picture postcard.

Old Mrs. Threadwell was difficult to please, because she was so deaf and so short-sighted that she neither heard what he said, nor saw whether he was smiling or scowling at her, and so long as he paid his rent she didn't mind ; besides, if she did happen to see an expression on his face she didn't understand, or hear a remark that called for an answer, the effort of making an adequate response brought on her asthma. Molly Campbell was neither deaf, nor blind, nor asthmatic.

A London girl of her class would have dropped her aitches or spoken with a Cockney accent. Molly, being Scots, had a soft-toned voice, dropped other consonants, but never an aitch, and John found her pronounced "rs" and prolonged open vowels both pretty and refined. He was quite unaware that he was the cause of some of the reprimands she endured from her irascible parent.

One morning he found her waiting for him with red eyes.

"What's the matter?" he asked kindly.

"Nothing."

"Oh nonsense! You're crying all over the typewriter!"

"It's my father," she said, choking back a sob.

"He's gone into the City and won't be back till this afternoon. If he's in a bad temper he's time to change into a good one by then. What's he been scolding you for?"

He expected to be told of some trivial occurrence at the office that a few words of praise would put right; but, somewhat to his embarrassment, Molly took him into her confidence.

"My fairther is Established, and my mother that's dead was Episcopalian," she began. John stared at her blankly.

"What's the difference?"

"It is just two Churches we have in Scotland," explained the girl timidly.

"Oh, I see," said John, who had never been to Scotland and didn't see at all.

"My fairther don't hold with Episcopalians, but he was a just man, and while my mother lived he agreed that we children should go to the kirk with him on the Sunday morning and to the church with my mother in the evening."

"That seemed a fair arrangement—for them," said John judicially, beginning to be interested in the theological education of the Campbell offspring.

"When she died last year and we came to London, I kept it up. Mother said not to anger my fairther, but he never minded till lately. I found a bonny

church to go to every Sunday. I didn't know but that it was Episcopalian, but it seems it is not that. It's a Catholic church, Roman Catholic, and my fairther is terrible angry, says he'll me turn out of the house and out of the works if I go there again."

"Then don't go," said John, comfortably.

"But I prefairr it," said Molly in her slow Seottish voice.

John leaned back in his chair and stared at her. The girl in her sedate challenge seemed to epitomise the spirit of the Scottish Covenanters, to sum up the whole creed of the divine rights of private judgment.

"I don't know what's to be done about that," he said soberly. "How old are you?"

"I'm nineteen."

"Then I think you're too young to disobey your father. You'd better give in till you're older."

"Nineteen's not that young," she said with firmness.

"Why not talk to a clergyman?" he suggested. "Get professional advice?"

Molly pondered deliberately.

"I shall do that," she said with the pleased smile of one fortified with sage counsel. "Will I be getting on with your letters now?"

John had a rush of work just then. William Dalliac was in Scotland with his family; he trusted John, and left a good deal of responsibility to him, and had raised his salary.

He couldn't desert his post to rush over to Paris to Anne, which was what he longed to do. Several evenings he only reached the printing works at six o'clock, and kept Molly Campbell for two or three hours over the day's correspondence. Molly didn't

mind. Her evenings at home under her father's eye were dull, and the only happy interest in her life was her work for John. She began to look forward to the days when there was a heavy post that would keep her longer in his presence. His gentleness, his consideration for her, raised her to some heaven of delight, of whose existence she had hitherto never dreamed. It was a perfectly innocent delight and a strange heaven ; there was a typewriter in it and a good deal of waste paper, and it was inhabited by a kind-hearted, untidy, absent-minded young man and his tired, elated secretary, who asked nothing more than the infinite perpetuation of their work together. John was so absorbed in the thought of Anne alone in Paris, so occupied in wondering what he could do to ensure that, whoever suffered from the vagaries of fortune and other peoples' behaviour, it should not be Anne, that he was oblivious of the fact that Molly was engaged in the feminine pursuit of putting him upon a pedestal and burning incense before him. He did remember once to ask her how she was getting on with her father, and the simplicity of her answer baffled him.

"Not so well as might be. I did what you recommended, Mr. Halliday. I went to the priest, and he was a kindly old body, but he advised me to wait awhile and to pray hard for the convairrsion of my fairther ; but my fairther will be no that easy to convairrt. He says he'll break every bone in my body if I dare have the infernal impertinence to pray for him, and then he says he'll skin the priest."

John looked harassed. When he had advised the girl to take professional clerical advice he had imagined she would go to the family minister of

whatever denomination it was that her father patronised ; instead, she had chosen her own brand of adviser, and the matter had apparently taken a step in a stormy direction. Campbell's brutality of speech, as reported so demurely by his calm daughter, disgusted him ; that wasn't the way to argue with nice children of nineteen. The man was a bully ; John detested bullies.

"The priest seems to be a wise man," he said aloud. "Do what he says, wait a while. Your father can't censor your private prayers you know."

Molly hesitated.

"I was thinking that maybe you would say a word to my fairther."

"I'm afraid he'd think it was hardly my business. I might make things worse."

"It could not do that," said the girl slowly. "He's that rough and hard when the drink is in him. And it isn't only the church I go to that's wrong. Last night he said that if I stayed in the office after hours he'd thrash me."

"Oh I say, I can't have that you know !" exclaimed John. "I keep you to get through the letters. Of course you must be paid overtime, and all that sort of thing."

"I don't want overtime pay," said Molly, flushing.

"Well, I'll have it out with him," said John haughtily. "And that now."

He left Molly in his office, and went in search of the manager. He found him in the compositors' room, and beckoned him aside.

"Look here, Campbell," he said in an undertone that could not be heard by the men at the other

end of the long room. "What's all this nonsense about you refusing to let your daughter work overtime? The work has got to be done. You were anxious enough for the girl to get the job, and she's a good girl and does it very well. I'm perfectly satisfied with her. But understand, if she stays on a bit late occasionally it is my doing, not hers. I keep her, and I won't have her bullied. I'm as considerate to her as I can be, but work is work, as you know perfectly well."

Campbell flushed angrily.

"So my girl's a good girl is she?" he growled.

"Certainly she is—a very good girl."

"And it's your doing if she stays late, is it?"

The man's voice was thick and stupid and threatening. John looked at him keenly. He had been drinking.

"This won't do, Campbell," he said authoritatively.

"You must come to the works sober, or I shall speak to Mr. Dalliac; and then you'll get sacked." He turned on his heel and went back to his own office. As he ran down the stone steps he heard Campbell's voice raised in anger.

"Have me sacked will he? If I don't let my girl work overtime? Get me the sack. . . ."

John hoped the man was not too drunk to understand the threat; if he were, he supposed he would have to speak to him again when he was sober.

"I've spoken to your father," he said cheerfully to Molly, "and there's nothing to detain you after hours this evening."

Molly disconsolately wished there had been. To her prayers for her father's conversion that evening she added the petition that the next day would bring

a heavy post to the works, one that would keep her there late. It did.

There was a very heavy post the next day, and John sorted the letters into those that had to be answered immediately and those that could be left over until the following day. When he had dictated the last urgent missive he ran upstairs to speak to the foreman. There was a London bye-election, and several of the printers were working overtime on one of the candidate's addresses to his constituents. The author of it was apparently endowed with a lurid taste in invective. John had the galley-proof in his hand ; it had just been brought down to him by an ink-stained, oil-stained boy.

"I say, Marsh, we must stop this. It is a scurrilous production, there'll be trouble if we print it. Hold up the job till I telephone through about it. Where's Campbell ?"

"Downstairs, sir. In his office."

John turned away and ran down.

The manager's office was on the half-landing at the foot of the first flight of stone stairs. The door was wide open, and Molly was with her father. He could hear their voices, Campbell's loud and hectoring, Molly's soft and scared : then he heard the sound of a blow, and a cry of pain from the girl. John took the last steps in a bound, and saw Molly reel back against the wall with the marks of her father's heavy fingers reddening her pale cheek. Sobbing and frightened, she turned to rush out of the office, but in the doorway her father seized her wrist and raised his hand to box her ears again. But John was in time to catch Campbell by the arm.

"Stop that, you drunken brute !" he exclaimed.

"Get out of the way," he said to Molly, who, only too glad to obey him, fled downstairs.

Campbell had been drinking heavily, and hit out blindly. John left go of his arm, stepped back, and struck him. The blow was a savage one, John meant to punish him severely; he put into it not only all his physical strength, but the whole force of the pent-up anger and indignation that had been brewing in his heart: he struck not only in defence of Molly but a metaphorical blow on Anne's behalf; he had a legitimate chance of doing what he had wanted to do for some time—hit somebody really hard. Men who were brutal to women deserved no mercy. He would have struck him again, but Campbell saved him the trouble by falling heavily backwards against the wall and sideways down the stone stairs. And then he lay still. The boy, drawn to the fight by the force that attracts boys to scenes of violence and accidents as surely and mysteriously as steel filings are attracted to a magnet, appeared on the stairs, and squealed shrilly in joyful excitement:

"Mr. Halliday's foighting the guv'nór."

John turned round sharply. He felt it was more important to cuff the boy than to pick up the manager. The men ran down to the recumbent figure and straightened it out of the crumpled heap.

"Fetch some water," said John to the boy instead of cuffing him. The foreman said, "Better try whiskey, sir," in a confidential undertone.

They tried both, unavailingly. A queer silence settled down on the badly lit staircase. They could hear Molly's typewriter industriously clicking away in the distance downstairs. Marsh, the foreman, straightened himself and scratched his head.

"Better send for the doctor, sir. He seems a bit stunned like."

"Where's the nearest?" said John impatiently, still half annoyed that the man had crumpled up before he had been sufficiently punished—he'd only been hit once.

"The Temperance 'Orspital," one of the printers suggested.

"No, Dr. Jessop will be in his Infirmary up the road yet," said another.

The boy was sent off, ordered to look sharp; he ran with heels winged with importance. The telephone bell rang. It was the Radical agent making enquiries about the election literature. John spoke to him, argued with him, refused to proceed with the printing unless one paragraph was deleted and another altered. When he had carried his point he went back to the group of men on the stairs. The doctor had arrived, and was on his knees on the landing as John went up the stairs. He stood up, and peered at John over his spectacles.

"Nothing to be done, I'm afraid," he said. "The man's neck is broken."

"Do you mean—that—that I've killed him?" John asked.

"I don't know anything about who's killed him," said the doctor. "But the man is dead."

CHAPTER XVIII

A CATASTROPHE that comes suddenly upon unprepared minds is difficult to recognise. Tragedy needs preparation. No human dramatist would let loose terror and lamentation upon the stage without an adequate warning, without giving the muse time to change her mask of comedy. But life is artless, and its dramatic methods more merciful; the horror of anticipation is used sparingly, the secrets of the future are kept inviolate in the guardianship of hope. John, aghast as he was at the accident, grasped the situation slowly. His first emotion was one of vivid anger at the stupidity of the occurrence. There had been a horrible, ridiculous, inexcusably careless mistake—not on his part, but on Duncan Campbell's, or on something else's. He, John Halliday, wasn't responsible for the appallingly mad result of a perfectly sane and sensible action. In nightmares, houses fell down when you knocked at the front door, ships foundered in smooth seas, and trains ran off the rails and chased their frightened passengers over open country; but in real life such things couldn't be: and in real life when one punched a fellow-man's head and knocked him down he got up eventually, and either shook hands or hit back. But Duncan Campbell always was a surly ruffian, John reflected bitterly.

At first he was more concerned with the logical sequence of the immediate results of the death than with his own misfortune. Molly had to be considered. Dr. Jessop took charge of her, took her home. There was the work in hand upstairs on the machines to be got through. Marsh was to be trusted, his competence and common sense emerged; he rose to the responsibility. There was a coroner's inquest to be arranged. John was worried about that in a dazed way; he knew nothing about such things. But the police took that matter in hand, and then John realised that he was involved in a serious tangle with the machinery of the law.

He sent a long telegram to William Dalliac, and a shorter one to an old friend of his, an impecunious solicitor. He thought he might as well do Edward Low a good turn by putting work in his way, as he was advised that he should be represented at the inquest.

Edward Low, a phlegmatic, kind-hearted young man, found his client filled with remorse rather than with apprehension.

"It's an awful accident to have happened," he complained after he had recounted the circumstances. "What worries me so is that, in a way, it wasn't entirely an accident either, because I meant to hit him, and to hit him hard too."

Edward Low cross-questioned him. Then he went to the printing works and interviewed Marsh and the other men. He returned to John with a lugubrious countenance.

"Not much chance of the coroner's jury giving a verdict of accidental death," he informed John. "You quarrelled with the man the day before in

front of witnesses, because he objected to you keeping his daughter there after office hours ; threatened to get him the sack. Then you keep the girl overtime, and knock him downstairs. You'll be charged with homicide, and it is no good blinking at it."

"Justifiable homicide comes to the same thing, I suppose."

Edward Low fidgeted through the notes he had made.

"Of course you never do know with a jury," he said carefully.

William Dalliac hurriedly returned from Scotland, and his consternation revealed to John that the case was not likely to be so simple as he had imagined it was.

"When there's a girl at the bottom of it, it looks black," he said.

"But the girl was hardly at the bottom of it," expostulated John. "She was very much at the top. Only it would be a shame to drag her into it."

"I don't know how you imagine she can be left out," said Edward Low.

John sat through the inquest in a fever of weary horror. The medical evidence seemed to him unduly and maddeningly protracted. The man's neck was broken, how could disgusting petty physiological details matter ? What did it signify if it was broken before or after he fell down the stairs ? He was dead anyway. And what did it matter how drunk the man had been, or whether he was drunk at all ?

The punctilious, slow method of the law tortured John. Why couldn't he be allowed to speak out and stop the proceedings by saying, "It is quite right,

I killed him ; but it was an accident. Can't you all see how sorry I am ? Can't you sympathise with me ? It is such an awful thing to have done, to have killed a man by mistake. But can't I be let off this inquisition ? Need you go on rubbing it in ? I can't do more than own up, and I shall suffer for it all my life."

That was what he wanted to say ; instead, he had to sit there silently and listen to the evidence.

The men at the works were called as witnesses. They testified that though Campbell was a heavy drinker—"a hearty drinker" was the expression Marsh stuck to—he was not what the coroner and jury might call drunk, either the day of his death or the day before that. Truculent he might have been—the men used the word "nasty"—but that might have been due to the natural spirit of the man, and not to the artificial stimulus of overmuch whiskey. At any rate, he wasn't drunk enough to deserve sudden death was the leading idea in their minds that coloured their evidence. As for the quarrel, they had all heard Campbell's version of his own grievance : he had objected to his daughter being kept after office hours by Mr. Halliday. Mr. Halliday had overridden him ; threatened him with dismissal ; had detained the girl the following evening. Then there had been an unwitnessed row, and the manager had been knocked downstairs and killed.

Molly gave evidence very nervously. After an interview with Edward Low, she was terrified lest her testimony might somehow prove disastrous for John ; and her anxiety was plain. Her caution gave the impression that she was keeping something back. She was so young and pretty and timid that the

sympathy of the court and the jury went out to her in her distress, sympathy that subtly reacted against John.

Mr. Halliday had always been very kind to her, she said. It was true her father had objected to her staying late at the office, but her father had objected to many things she wanted to do. He had been a good father to her, only terribly strict ; stricter lately, since her mother had died. She liked working at the office. She had told Mr. Halliday her father objected and had asked Mr. Halliday to speak to him about it. On the night of the twenty-fifth her father had called her up into his office, and had ordered her to go home. When she said she had not finished her work he boxed her ears. Then Mr. Halliday came downstairs and prevented her father striking her again ; told her to run away. That was all she knew. She did not see her father strike Mr. Halliday. She saw nothing. The reason her father gave for not wanting her to work late at the office was (here she broke down and wept) that he said he wouldn't have any nonsense. She couldn't say what he meant by nonsense, except that he said he wouldn't have Mr. Halliday put notions into her head. She broke down again, and repeated that Mr. Halliday had always been very kind to her.

The sympathies of the jury were with the slain man. They returned a verdict of "murder."

John's legal adviser, who had expected a verdict of manslaughter, endeavoured to console him by cursing the jury.

"A jury is all very well if you've a thundering weak case. Ten to one they'll let a criminal off. If you've a good case, give me a judge. . . . Perhaps

it is just as well. We'll plead not guilty to a murder charge; with a verdict of manslaughter you could only have put up a defence of extenuating circumstances."

John bowed his head in his hands.

"What bowls me over," he groaned, "isn't the verdict, it's the damned general unfairness. Not only have I killed that poor girl's father, but the case for the prosecution seems to involve damaging the girl's character by insinuating that I had designs upon her. That is so rotten. Why can't they leave that alone?"

"What was there between you and the girl?"

"Nothing, man. Absolutely nothing."

"Do you mean you never said a word to her that wasn't strictly business?"

"Oh, of course I talked to her sometimes."

"What does she mean by saying you were very kind to her? Ever given her anything?"

"No, nothing—except advice."

"Advice? What about?"

"Her private affairs. She had religious difficulties; we discussed the subject occasionally. But understand, I won't have that brought up! I've done the girl quite enough harm without that. I won't have her publicly cross-questioned about her most intimate personal feelings."

"You needn't worry about that," said the harassed solicitor. "It isn't likely I'd want to come out with such a poor tale. Who's going to believe that you kept a pretty girl after office hours to discuss her religious difficulties? If you're going to pitch a tale, don't pitch a pious one. Sanctimoniousness is the last thing to go down with the British jury."

John discovered that while all his friends and acquaintances had a satisfyingly firm faith in his innocence of the charge of felonious homicide they had an equally firm faith in the theory that behind the quarrel and the accident was some intrigue with the girl Molly. Opinion was divided as to whether he was animated by a chivalrous desire to shield the girl, or by an equally mistaken notion that he was defending himself; it was unanimous in its belief that there was something to be repudiated or confessed.

An aunt from Scotland had appeared on the scene and taken charge of Molly with a firm hand. John, anxious to know how she fared, wrote to her and got no answer, until one afternoon an old man was ushered in to him, a grey-haired, clean-shaven old man in shabby clerical dress.

"I'm Father Meredith," he announced. "I've come at the request of Miss Molly Campbell, who is very upset because her aunt will not permit her to answer your letter. She was so miserable, poor child, that I undertook to explain to you the reason for her silence. The aunt seems a sensible woman, somewhat hard, but she is not unkind to the child. She takes the view that she is in a difficult position, and of course she is right."

"It is very good of you to come all the way to Brixton! Do sit down. Are you the priest she spoke to me about?"

"I fancy I must be."

"I suppose now she'll become a Catholic, poor child," was John's next attempt at carrying on the conversation felicitously.

The old man smiled.

"I'm not so sure. I shall be very surprised if the

aunt lets her wander so far. She seems a woman of character, and, I fancy, means to take her away to Scotland as soon as possible. That will be the best thing for her."

John looked surprised.

"She came from Scotland. All her friends are there," explained the old man.

"I know, only I thought you'd want to keep her here," said John.

"To make a convert of her? She needs more time. At present she just has a taste for ritual, and was moved by the wish to escape from the jurisdiction of her father." He smiled. "Now, Mr. Halliday, I have fulfilled my mission." He rose to go, but was detained by John's next question.

"Father Meredith, you don't believe . . . I don't want her friends to believe that there is anything underhand going on. Her father was a cantankerous man: he hit her, it made my blood boil, and I struck him. Honestly, if she had been a child of ten I should have done the same."

"I think she knows that. She has the very greatest respect for you. As for gossip and speculations, people's memories are shorter than their tongues. A very little time brings forgetfulness. Suspensions by themselves don't make tragedies, or there'd be very little peace in the world."

"I wish there was something I could do," said John wistfully.

The old man scrutinised his haggard young face, then said simply:

"We are all in God's hands, my son. I will pray for you."

"I'm not a Catholic," said John hastily.

"You mean you would prefer to dispense with the prayers of an old man?"

"No, I'm not such an ungracious cur. I only meant I didn't want them on false pretences."

Father Meredith laughed. "We priests get funny things said to us sometimes," he remarked genially as he shook hands.

John, whose spirit was sore, liked the old man, for he was simple and kind and unworldly, and the sympathy he had hitherto received was as futile as a misplaced surgical dressing; that is, it was applied to a sound limb while his real wound was left unhealed.

Anne heard of his predicament from Francesca. The case had not been reported in *Le Matin*, and she and Marian were seeing no English newspapers. She was furious.

"How perfectly idiotic!" she exclaimed. "As if John would murder anyone! Why he wouldn't hurt a fly. I suppose I'd better go back and give evidence."

"What about?" enquired Marian. "You weren't there."

"But I can tell them how kind and harmless he always was."

"They'll never let you," Marian assured her. "The fact that he never knocked you downstairs isn't evidence. He's not accused of ill-treating you: he's accused of killing a man you've never set eyes on."

Nevertheless Anne decided to return to London. She accordingly left just before the date fixed for John's trial. She notified nobody of her intention. When Francesca returned from a shopping expedi-

tion she heard that Anne was in the nursery with Phil. She ran upstairs.

"Anne dear!" She kissed her. "Why didn't you wire? I'd have come to the station to meet you. What an unaccountable child you are! Gilbert is out."

"I'm worried about John. I've come over to see if there was anything I can do."

"Everything possible is being done. Mr. Dalliac has got him the best legal advice, and they've briefed Yarborough to defend him."

"Why isn't Mr. Ackroyd defending him?"

"Gilbert says he's not the best counsel for a case like this, because it isn't a complicated question of law. It will be a matter of playing on the feelings of the jury. His defence is that it was an accident."

"Of course it was an accident! Poor John! I must go to him. I expect he'd like to see me."

Francesca looked at her watch.

"Yes, of course. I'll take you now, if you like?"

"I can go alone."

"I was going, anyway. Gilbert arranged I should to-day. He wrote and asked to see me. He is at Brixton."

"In prison? How ridiculous!"

They sent for a taxi, and drove out, keeping up a desultory duet of questions and answers about Phil, and Anne's journey, navigating the waters of conversation cautiously to avoid running on to hidden and uncharted shoals. On the way, Anne stopped the cab at a florist's and bought an armful of flowers red roses and lilies-of-the-valley and violets. Francesca thought her recklessly extravagant. It was mid-winter.

John's face lit up with a rapturous smile when he saw Anne. Tears came into his eyes as she gave him the flowers.

"Anne! Fancy you bringing me all these! How did you know I was longing for flowers? I didn't know it myself. No. I'll enjoy them after you're gone. I want to look at you now."

After he had greeted Francesca and thanked her for coming, he said, "Anne, don't come to the trial."

"I thought you'd like your friends there."

"It is good to see you again, but I should hate you to watch me in the dock."

"That is nonsense, John. It is all a mistake. You'll be out at the end of ten minutes, if they've any sense."

"I don't know—it is all like a nightmare, except you coming like this. When did you get back?"

"Only a few hours ago. I came over to see you. As soon as you're free I'm going back again."

"Oh, surely not, Anne!" came from Francesca.

"Yes I am."

"What for?" asked John.

Anne flushed, but she seized this opportunity of enlightening Francesca, and, through her, Gilbert, by an indirect method.

"I've got my work. I've found out what I can do, and I'm going to do it and make money."

"What is it?"

"Designing. I can design wonderful dresses, and sell the designs to the big dressmaking firms." Through her long lashes she glanced sideways at Francesca to see how she received this information. Francesca looked perplexed and thwarted. "I can make a lot of money over it."

"Couldn't you play at the game in London?" pleaded John.

"I suppose I could, but . . ." She hastily turned the conversation. "But I came to see you, not to talk about anything so frivolous as frocks when you're in trouble."

John leaned over his clasped hands on the table and spoke earnestly. "But, Anne, it is me; I mean what you're doing matters to me more than anything. I'm . . . I'm your trustee, and though I've relinquished that, I can't help thinking the same way."

"Relinquished it?"

"Yes, I thought I'd better. Didn't Gilbert tell you?"

"I've not seen him yet."

"You see there is a chance that I'll get sent to prison for manslaughter."

"Oh, nonsense, John! Don't be so gloomy."

"Well I've got to be prepared for it."

"You won't get sent to prison," she said incredulously, and turned to Francesca for confirmation, but Francesca merely looked worried.

"If I am," he persisted, "it would worry me horribly if I didn't know you were safely in England. Anne, won't you promise me that if I do get sent to prison you won't go away to Paris, at any rate till I come out?"

"What difference can it make to you if I'm safely in London or safely in Paris?"

"All the difference in the world."

"All right. I promise. You won't get sent to prison. Of course you won't! It is safe to promise anything. It is a ridiculous idea. It's this depressing

place makes you think of such things." She gave a little shiver. "Poor John, what a shame it all is! Let me put the flowers in water for you before we go. Where can I find vases and water?"

While she was occupied with the flowers, Francesca said to John:

"Was there anything you were going to ask me to do for you?"

He had written to ask her to come to him; told her he had a favour to beg. She imagined he was going to request her to befriend the girl, Molly Campbell.

"Yes," said John. "If I do get locked up I shall be allowed occasional letters. Will you write to me sometimes, and tell me all about Anne? Tell me what is happening to her, whether she is well and happy and all that sort of thing?" He spoke in a low, hurried, urgent voice. "Will you do this for me? It will be hell if I don't know about her. If she writes herself she'll just write anything she thinks will cheer me up. I want to know that I shall hear how things really go with her, whatever happens. That's the one thing I couldn't bear, not knowing about Anne."

"Yes, of course I will."

He thanked her with a grip of her hand that drove her rings into her fingers, and the sombre trouble in his face lifted.

Gilbert came home late that evening, after dinner.

"Hello!" he exclaimed when he perceived Anne in the depths of an arm-chair by the drawing-room fire. "So you've deigned to come back?"

"I was worried about John," she explained coldly.

"Yes, poor chap," he replied uneasily.

There was an awkward silence. Anne never stirred, and he stood on the hearth-rug with his back to the fire, looking down at her moodily. Their minds were full of John's trouble, and their hearts were full of their own. The memory of their last angry scene lay between them: they each desired to exonerate themselves from blame and retaliate somehow, however crudely, upon each other for the bitterness they both experienced.

"There isn't really a chance of John going to prison is there?" Anne asked.

"I'm afraid there is."

"Can't you do anything?"

"He's got the best possible counsel. His defence is that it was an accident."

"Of course it was an accident."

"Yes, but he'd had a row with the man the day before, and there's the girl in the case." Gilbert felt more at ease now they had found a conversational opening. He drew up a chair between his wife and sister and sat down, and Francesca left off counting the stitches of her knitting.

"What girl?"

"Campbell's daughter, his secretary—a very pretty girl too."

Anne stood up, and stared down into the fire with a heightened colour in her face. She had imagined John to be exclusively devoted to her, had regarded him as her especial property. She wouldn't have objected to his falling in love with someone of whom she approved; she would have extended the sanction of her approbation to somebody nice and rich and sensible, somebody not too fascinating, nor at all exacting, who would have made John a good

wife and recognised her (Anne's) prior claim on his admiration and adoration: with these qualifications she would have rejoiced over John's good fortune; but that he should get involved in a brawl over a pretty, insignificant, uneducated girl astounded her unpleasantly.

"All men are alike!" she said bitterly. "I'm tired. I'm going to bed. Good night." And with her head held high she marched away, and they heard her bang and lock her bedroom door.

"She must be worn out," said Francesca tolerantly. "She crossed to-day, and we've been all the way to Brixton. I don't believe one word about that girl. John seems to be hopelessly in love with Anne."

John's counsel was an ingenious man, and put up a series of vigorous defences. He pleaded that, as on the testimony of the witnesses only a few seconds had elapsed between the time John left the men at the printing machines and the moment when they were called downstairs by the boy, the assault, or fight, could not have been of a serious nature, until it was pointed out by the prosecution that it had been serious enough to cause death, when he discarded that line, and pleaded provocation, the gross provocation of seeing an innocent girl maltreated by a drunken bully. The counsel for the Crown pointed out that they had no evidence that the man was drunk; that he was the girl's father; that by all accounts he was an excellent father; and that the men had quarrelled the day before on the question of the girl being kept overtime; that in detaining her overtime the provocation that led to the fatal quarrel had rather been given by the prisoner; and that the protection of the girl devolved on her natural

guardian, her father, and not on her self-appointed champion, whose attitude to her was unexplained.

The counsel for the defence made an eloquent and impassioned address to the jury. John listened to it with the detached admiration he would have given to a similar performance on the stage. He could not quite realise that it was his own life and liberty at stake, it seemed too grotesque. He watched the faces of the jury, middle-aged men, most of them old enough to have daughters of Molly's age—did they impute evil to innocent minds, and strike their children? He wondered if they were all believing the very worst of him; and were they much to blame if they were? After all, the majority of good citizens kept out of the dock in the criminal court. A certain prejudice against any sane man who was found therein was excusable; the odds were in favour of his being a fool or a knave. John found himself trying to judge the jury kindly, and hoping they would be as fair to him as he was being to them.

The judge summed up the case with the oracular impartiality of a machine into which the opposing counsel had poured their respective eloquence, and which, by its inner mechanism, mingled all their facts together and gave back a mixture of both, much as a loom supplied with black and white threads might yield a final product of checked cloth. He pointed out that the law presupposed every unlawful killing to be murder, and that the onus of proof that would reduce the offence to manslaughter lay upon the defence; that the only witness for the defence was the prisoner himself; that if the jury believed the prisoner's own story, that the fatal

blow was struck in sudden unpremeditated anger they would find a verdict of manslaughter; but that if they believed the quarrel arose out of ill-will of longer duration, if in fact they found the blow was delivered in malice aforethought, it was their duty to find the prisoner guilty of murder.

After an absence of a quarter of an hour the jury returned with a verdict of manslaughter, and the judge pronounced a sentence of five years penal servitude.

John's white lips moved. He tried to cry out, "That's awfully unfair!" but some force inside his brain controlled his despairing, rebellious spirit, and kept him silent. The trust in the intrinsic goodness of human nature that children bring into the world with them, the belief that however cruel life may be to other people it will be gentle to oneself, dies hard. He had never really thought that they would be so cruelly, stupidly unjust. His one coherent thought as he left the court was a passionate regret that he had asked Anne not to come to the trial. He longed desperately for one last glimpse of her dear little face before he was put away into prison for five years.

The sentence was a surprise to John's friends. They had expected the verdict, but had anticipated that he would get the minimum sentence. They were sorry for him; but they had all done their best, and he had been a fool. All they could do now was to pass on, and submit to his fate with a sustaining sense of relief that it wasn't theirs. Gilbert, on the way back to Chelsea, tried to think of a way of breaking the news to Anne. After all, she wasn't heartless, and would feel it keenly.

She was waiting for him in the hall.

"Well?" she asked, and her blue eyes were imperious.

"Manslaughter they found it," he said reluctantly.

"Is he to go to prison?"

"Yes."

"For how long? How long for?" she persisted.

"Five years."

She stared at him incredulously. "Five years!"

Gilbert nodded, as he took off his hat and coat.

"Can't something be done about it?"

"I'm afraid not."

"It isn't fair—just for killing a man!"

He followed her into the dining-room, and crouched over the fire. There was a cold damp fog outside.

"Appearances were against him about the girl."

"And people who do much worse things don't get imprisoned! It's frightfully unfair!" She clenched her fists, and her underlip quivered. He could see her lashes lying on her cheeks in long wet points. She looked a pathetic little creature, and with a sudden impulse he stretched out his hand to take hers, but she snatched it away.

"Don't touch me!" she said.

CHAPTER XIX

GILBERT had imagined that when Anne came home he would be able to adjust the situation she had created ; but he could not find the phrases. He was extremely angry when Anne repulsed his attempts to make peace.

All his life, whatever he wanted had come to him without requiring much effort from him. He had passed his examinations without difficulty though without distinction. He was good-looking, well-born, intelligent ; he found the world an amiable place. Francesca had been a model sister, he had never quarrelled with her. He had won Anne without any difficulty, he had been happy. He was only moderately successful in his profession, but he was not personally ambitious. He was always inclined to take the line of least resistance provided it did not lead him to trespass on obviously dangerous ground. Anne was made differently : she always went straight on in the direction she wished to go, regardless of danger, or difficulties, or notice boards warning trespassers of prosecution. It amused Gilbert to watch her, as long as she confined her trespassing within the boundaries of other people's prejudices ; but when she disregarded his landmarks, and wandered off the path of rectitude as it was marked on his plan of the moral universe, he was

indignant. He magnified her offences in order to palliate his own, or at least to dwarf his own into insignificance. Anne had not only behaved badly herself, she had provoked him into losing his temper and behaving badly too. He found it more difficult to forgive her for not wanting his forgiveness when he offered it than for not forgiving him. He would have liked to have it out with her if he could have been quite sure beforehand that the result of such a debate would have left him with the honours in his hands; but he was not at all sure. Anne cared nothing for his dignity or her own if it came to a scene. She was as incalculable as Phil, who was wont to throw anything he could lay hands on out of the nursery window when he was in a temper. If he had had a perfectly clear conscience it would have been easy to manage her, but as it was he hesitated about engaging her in a duel of wills. He felt like an unarmed man who did not know what weapons his adversary secretly possessed or meant to use, a strong disinclination to open combat.

Indirectly his rankling sense of discomfort led to his quarrelling with Laura Blake. He had been accustomed to confide in her, not because he valued her advice, but because he was soothed by her sympathy. She was too egotistical to divine that he was suffering on account of the estrangement of his wife; she attributed his despondency to his financial worries. As he was worried about money he assented to this interpretation of his depression. One evening when he was dining with her, she broke a gloomy silence by saying :

“Charles has a new thing up his sleeve.”

As she rarely mentioned her husband Gilbert

guessed that there was some purpose behind her irrelevance.

"He doesn't often let me into his secrets," she went on. "But I opened a telegram of his and asked questions. He said it really is a good thing. Nitrates this time, whatever they may be. Anyway they've found them on the property of the Heron's Creek Silver Mining Company. The shares are low now; they are going to jump up in a day or two, according to Charlie. Why don't you buy some and make a little fortune?"

"These things sound so simple always," Gilbert remarked vaguely.

"But they are when you know. This is a straight tip. Charlie only told me to keep me in a good mind, he wished me to be polite to some of the impossible men he will bring home to dinner."

Gilbert evaded a discussion on the subject, but the matter remained in his mind. He ruminated upon it as he walked home to Chelsea. He did not doubt the accuracy of the information—Charles Blake knew how to make money. He disliked speculation, but he equally disliked being in debt. He had not the gambling temperament, but neither had he the temperament to bear with placidity sordid money troubles that pinched his pride. His mind played with the temptation as a cat plays with a mouse, only sometimes the rôles were reversed; at moments he felt as if he were the mouse and the temptation was the cat.

But Anne had a curious power over him. If he had lost her affection, it might come back. He took that easily, for temper; but he desired her good opinion, and was determined to deserve it. He could

placate himself with the theory that Anne would forgive his momentary infatuation for Laura Blake, afterwards. She would despise him if he gambled and lost money; but she would judge him more harshly for making money in an unhonourable way. He finally decided that it was dishonourable of Laura Blake to have given him the information and urged him to make use of it.

The next time he saw her she questioned him on the subject.

"I hope you made a good thing out of Heron's Creek shares?"

They had fulfilled all the predictions by rising prodigiously.

"No; I left them alone."

"Hadn't you faith in me?"

"Yes, but I decided not to use the information."

"Whyever not?"

"I thought it was hardly the right thing to do."

She annoyed him by raising her eyebrows superciliously.

"I suppose you have some male esoteric code of honour that a mere woman cannot be expected to understand?"

"Not at all. I know Anne would have agreed with me if I'd asked her, she's awfully straight."

Gilbert was off his guard, the remark slipped out quite innocently. Lady Blake never forgave him; nor, to do Gilbert justice, did he ever ask her to do so.

Anne's decision to say nothing but to go her own way enabled him to behave as if nothing had happened, and to pretend that the "nothing" that separated them like an unsheathed sword was her doing and not his.

The success that rewards the attempts of two people to behave as though nothing had happened depends, when the two amateur actors are man and wife, upon the amount of discomfort experienced by the audience for whose benefit the play is produced, success being in inverse ratio to the discomfort. When the audience is a stranger, or an obtuse or slow-witted acquaintance, the discomfort inflicted will probably be at zero, and the success complete, if not gratifying to the two performers: but when the audience is a friend and a relation the discomfort is likely to be complete, and the resultant illusion nil.

Francesca was not only a friend and relation, but a guest. She found the "nothing whatever the matter" farce too uncomfortable to witness from the front row of the stalls, as it were, and retreated a little farther off. To drop the metaphor, after watching the strenuous efforts of Gilbert and Anne to deceive her into the delusion that everything was all right in the face of her knowledge that everything was all wrong, she went back to her own home. It was not impatience with them, nor any selfish desire to spare herself annoyance that took her away, but the belief that in her absence they would come to their senses.

Her letters to John Halliday in Parkhurst Prison were the only record of her impression. The first year of his imprisonment he was allowed two letters.

"DEAR JOHN,

There is very little news to tell you; but I must keep my promise of writing to you about Anne. She is looking very well, prettier than ever,

and her work, as she calls it, seems to be not only an amusing but a lucrative occupation for her. She is certainly very clever, not only in designing wonderful frocks, but in obtaining what seems to me exorbitant prices for her sketches. She is very original, some of those I've seen are most picturesque, others very daring. I can't think who wears them. And the extravagance of them ! There must be many more millionaires in the world than were dreamed of in my humble conception. Gilbert doesn't seem to mind her making money, and she certainly enjoys spending it. I cannot be truthful and say I am happy about those two. They seem to be drifting apart. I tried to probe Anne, but it was like trying to probe a limpet when it is determined to cling fast to its rock of reserve. She usen't to have such a hard shell to retire into ; she seems to have grown one quite suddenly. But after all they cannot drift very far apart with the child to draw them together. It is a great pity there is only the one. Phil is a cheery imp and is staying with me at the moment. He has just appeared at the window, looking rather disconcerted, saying : ' Francesca, I've swallowed a grasshopper ! ' I enquired however he came to do that and he said : ' I was only just kissing it, and it hopped down my throat. ' I don't suppose it will hurt him, I believe they are akin to locusts, and locusts and wild honey must be more or less nutritious diet, according to the Bible."

Francesca stopped, and read through the letter with misgivings. Was this gossiping trivial chatter

the kindest letter she could write to an imprisoned man? She had never written to a prisoner before. She knew the letters were read by a censor and thought that John would not want her to write about himself. He would not think her unsympathetic. Although she was not satisfied with it she concluded with all the kind messages she had collected for his comfort.

Later in the year, when John might receive another letter, she had more news to tell him. Anne had declined to write, on the grounds that, as he was allowed so few letters, she surmised he would wish to hear from "that girl." Francesca didn't express her conviction that John's thoughts were centred in one person, because she thought that Anne was getting spoilt. However she wrote herself.

"DEAR JOHN,

Anne sends you her love, but as letter-writing is not her *métier* she delegates your letter to me. I am shortly leaving my cottage. An uncle of my late husband has recently died and I come in for a share of his estate. He was a very wealthy shipowner and I shall be comparatively a rich woman. I am thinking of renting Crane Hall from Gilbert and making my home there. It has been empty since the Dalliacs gave it up. I am very fond of it and shall like to keep it in the family. Then Gilbert and Anne can really regard it as their home, and as it will be Phil's in time it will be so nice for him to spend some of his childhood there. Gilbert and Anne are very generous in lending him to me. As for Anne she is well and prettier than ever. Sometimes I feel a little per-

turbed because some of the people she gets to know aren't very good associates for her. But what can one do? She has chosen a frivolous profession, and takes it desperately seriously. Yet underneath all the frivolity is her very innocent love for pretty things. Often I wish she weren't quite so mad, then when I am with her, I catch her enthusiasm for the joy of life and wish she would bite everyone else."

Francesca considered that this gave a faithful account of Anne sailing off exploring new fairy lands alone, leaving behind her husband as a benevolent spectator, and herself, Francesca, in the background, fidgeting over her welfare, yet not daring to interfere lest Anne be provoked into a rebellion and a quarrel. Once or twice they had come perilously near it. Francesca had no scruples about omitting certain doubts she felt with regard to Gilbert. It was Anne John was interested in. There was no need for her to commit to paper her opinion about her brother: she considered he was neglecting Anne, and she wondered whether Anne was too engrossed in her own work and interests to notice it, and whether it was loyalty or lack of interest that kept her so apparently indifferent.

Francesca prepared Crane Hall for her own habitation in low spirits. The flavour evaporated from all her hospitable plans if the two principal ingredients steadily refused to enter into the recipe in a palatable combination. In London, when Gilbert wasn't in his chambers in the Temple, he was at his Club, or away for week-ends at golf resorts; while Anne was out morning, noon, and night. Anne had promised to

help her with the redecoration of Crane Hall. Francesca had anticipated a pleasant orgy of shopping. Anne's taste was impeccable, and she knew all the London shops as well as Francesca knew the trees in her own garden ; but when the time came to choose chintzes and curtains Anne was too busy to spare the days ; she had been given her first commission on a large scale, to design the dresses and draperies for a forthcoming ballet. It was going to be the musical, dramatic, and literary sensation of the season, unless its promoters were prophesying more hopefully than the merits of the production warranted. The financier who had been induced to back the experiment had been introduced to Anne, and, admiring her taste, and his own taste in discernment, stipulated that the design should be entrusted to her. Anne won the confidence of everyone concerned by demanding a large price for undertaking the work, and concealed her intense nervousness with an air of calm assurance that deceived and amazed her friends and relations. So as Phil was the only member of the family who was prepared to take any active part in her labours, Francesca shopped alone. Anne was either ransacking London for materials, or studying colours in picture galleries, or looking up ancient costumes in museums and libraries, when she wasn't locked in her studio experimenting, and testing the effects of different lights on shades and fabrics.

At Easter, Phil went to spend his holiday with Francesca at Crane Hall. She had expected Gilbert and Anne, and had prepared their rooms for them, but the child came alone with his nurse. Anne telegraphed to say she was detained and hoped to

come later. Gilbert wrote to say he was spending a few days golfing at Sheringham with friends and wouldn't reach her as soon as he anticipated. Francesca tried to glean compensation for her disappointment from Phil's undiluted companionship ; but the child was tired after his journey, and languid, he left his hostess plenty of leisure that first afternoon to reflect with an irritated cynicism that Gilbert and Anne were selfish. "I'm useful in taking Phil off their hands, and that is all I'm worth to either of them . . ." ran her thoughts. She attempted to enliven the situation by providing an inordinately luxurious tea, but the little boy wasn't hungry. She looked round the table at the scones and strawberry jam, the seed cake and lemon biscuits, and tried to ward off this fresh disappointment by saying :

"Isn't there anything you'd like, darling ?"

"I think I'd like to come and sit on your lap," said Phil.

Francesca picked him up, and her heart beat more quickly as she sat down with him in an arm-chair by the fire.

"He must be ill," was her apprehension. He disowned a sore throat or a pain inside, but admitted a headache, and Francesca, with a foreboding of evil, sent for the doctor. Phil began to take a drowsy interest in himself.

"I don't think it can be measles because I've had them. And I've had chicken-pox : and I haven't got a pain in my jaws so it can't be mumps ; and it isn't whooping-cough. It might be scarlet fever or smallpox."

"Don't suggest anything like that, sweetheart."

"What other illnesses can boys get ?"

"We'll hope you're not going to get any illness," said Francesca with the artificial sanguine composure the right-minded keep in stock for use with children and invalids.

"I feel illnessy," said Phil. "I think perhaps you'd better put me to bed. And I should like you to carry me upstairs."

Francesca hoped he was dramatising the situation because he was well enough to enjoy a fuss being made of him; but his headache was evidently acute. The doctor came while Francesca was at dinner. She went upstairs with him, talking cheerful platitudes.

"Phil isn't well. I dare say I'm fussy, but you know what it is with other people's children, and you never do know what a child is sickening for."

The doctor went into the room with a breezy, "Well, my little man, what have you brought us down from London?"

Phil didn't answer: he was tossing with half-shut eyes in a paroxysm of dreadful restfulness. The doctor's expression changed. He took the little boy's temperature, felt his pulse, lifted up his eyelid and looked in his eye, holding a candle aslant so that it dropped melted wax on the sheet. Francesca's housewifely eye noticed this with an annoyance at men's clumsiness, just as the doctor turned to her, and said in a low shocked voice: "This is meningitis." Then he apologised for his abruptness as Francesca turned very white.

"What's to be done?"

"We'll try and pull him through. Better send for his mother."

Francesca had had the telephone installed. She got a trunk call through to Gilbert's hotel at Sheringham, and left a message for him; he was out: and then with some difficulty she got on to Anne at Chelsea. It was late and Anne had just gone to bed, she sounded sleepy.

"Yes, it is me, Anne. What on earth is it, Francesca? Phil ill? What is it? I can't hear. Appendicitis? Nonsense, he can't have that, he's had it out. Oh, meningitis! Is it serious?"

Francesca's voice shook as she replied: "It is for little babies, but Phil is strong. The doctor is hopeful, but you'd better come down to-morrow."

"I shall come at once of course."

"There's no train till the morning, my dear, but I had to let you know. He's not in pain, poor little boy. He has a very high temperature, and is being kept under morphia."

"Is that good or bad?" came Anne's anxious voice, then they were cut off.

"Bless the child, good or bad! She might be Phil's age," Francesca said to herself as she put up the receiver and returned to the sick-room. The doctor stayed on and they watched Phil all night. At two o'clock in the morning Gilbert arrived, having motored over from Sheringham. He seemed surprised and alarmed to find Francesca up.

"Oughtn't you to have a hospital nurse?"

"There's been no time to get one. One is coming in the morning. I've telephoned to Anne, but if she catches the first train she can't be here till nearly midday."

However, at six o'clock Anne arrived, having walked from the station. She had travelled on a

newspaper train part of the way, and then on a special.

"I rang up Mr. Ackroyd, he arranged it for me somehow," she said impatiently, when questioned in the hall: and Francesca threw off the despair that was clutching her to wait upon Anne. The doctor admitted her to Phil's room. She paused on the threshold.

"Is he asleep? I mustn't wake him."

"You won't disturb him—he's very ill."

"He's very strong," whispered Anne with desperate hopefulness.

But the little boy was not strong enough to resist the Angel of Death. He lay unconscious for two days, and then opened his big grey eyes and looked at Anne with a sleepy smile of recognition. Then he turned his head. Gilbert and Francesca were standing at the end of his bed. He stared past them, at the window; his little thin white face lit up with his own cheerful grin.

"Hullo, Mummy!" he said. "What a lark!"

Then he lay very still and silent, so still that the nurse by his bedside summoned the doctor from the next room. The doctor touched the little wrist, then he laid his hand gently on Anne's shoulder.

"It's all over," he said huskily. "He's been spared a lot of suffering."

Francesca's first thought was for Anne; she led her away and implored her to be brave as she wept over her; but Anne bore herself with a courage that seemed compounded of indignant incredulity and an indomitable will. Gilbert broke down, but Anne seemed to draw strength out of strange depths in her being, together with some anger with the doctors

for letting Phil die, and a rebellious conviction that somehow he could have been saved if only somebody had had more sense and more skill. While Gilbert and Francesca found comfort in reflecting that everything that science and devotion could do for the child had been done, Anne regarded Phil as the victim of a wanton outrage.

Juliet Dalliac came down for the funeral and took Anne in her arms and cried bitterly with her cheek against Anne's hair.

"At least the poor little darling is safe and happy in Heaven," she sobbed.

"I can't feel like that," said Anne. "I'm not sure I believe in Heaven, anyway you wouldn't want any of your children there. And if good people are right and there is such a place, I can't think of Phil there. He was too naughty to be really happy and safe in a Heaven."

Juliet said to Francesca that she thought Anne was overstrained.

Anne sought Marian Wyndham, who had come down by the same train and was pacing up and down the garden with her hands in her pockets, a cigarette between her lips, and tears in her kind grey eyes.

"I've shocked Juliet Dalliac by refusing to be consoled at the ludicrous idea of my dear naughty little Phil in her pious Heaven," she declared with a hard, defiant, valiant little smile on her white face. "If there were a Heaven he'd simply hate it."

Marian put her arm through Anne's.

"I suppose you've been brought up on a Calvinistic Heaven, so was I. I fancy children are wiser. They've no dread of Heaven. I believe they're the

only little souls who'll be really at home there. We've made 'of such are the kingdom of Heaven' such a hackneyed phrase that it has become an uncomfortable platitude, but I don't find it difficult to believe. God made children, and if He makes them He'll know all there is to know about them. He knows they're not saints. I expect Heaven is a very human place really."

But neither Marian, with her philosophical speculation, nor Juliet Dalliac with her sympathy, comforted Anne. Francesca, in the midst of her own grief for the child she had loved as her own, tried to assuage her brother's and Anne's, and to find some consolation in the hope that the sorrow might breach the distance between them. In her great desire that Gilbert and Anne might be drawn together she manœuvred them both into her sitting-room, and left them alone. Gilbert sat in the arm-chair with his head in his hands. Anne went to the window-seat, and looked out at the yellow butterflies dancing over a bed of wallflowers. Presently, to break a long silence that jarred on her nerves, Anne said :

"Thank God, we haven't any more children."

This speech grated on Gilbert's emotions.

"It's an awful thing to lose an only son," he said : it was the only thing he could think of to say, and he felt he had to exert himself to say something.

"We must try not to think of it," said Anne. "Grieving won't bring him back."

They were both worn out with watching and anxiety and sorrow ; they were both nervous. It was a strategic mistake of Francesca to throw them together at the moment. They were both absorbed in their own grief, and they thought each other

unsympathetic. Anne was quite aware of Francesca's aspirations, and the conventional notion that in the depths of their sorrow they should find peace and an artificial reconciliation did not appeal to her. She was on her guard against sentimental insincerity ; ready to ward off any attempt of Gilbert to make capital out of the situation : she felt she should despise him if he tried to do that. And Gilbert was keenly conscious of Anne's embarrassment. He understood her well enough to know what was passing in her mind. He was hurt that she should feel like that, he attributed it to her heartlessness, when it was really due to her nervousness. To spare her further uneasiness, he rose and went towards the door. He paused as he passed the window and laid his hand on her shoulder.

"Anne—when Phil was ill last year, we had a row over the operation. I'm sorry. I know now what you went through. I oughtn't to have—to have blown you up like that."

Anne was not in the mood for recriminations nor reminiscences. She wished Gilbert hadn't opened the subject. It was too late : she felt it didn't matter. He passed on without giving her time to decide how to receive his apology. He didn't want to give her another chance of widening the breach between them by repulsing him. That hurt her too. She told herself that he had apologised to soothe his own conscience, not her pain ; that if he had cared for her he would have said more. Quite illogically, because he had divined her wish and left her alone she resented it ; for the fulfilment brought her no sort of satisfaction, and he had deprived her of the chance of accepting his overture graciously. But

though the effort did not draw them nearer together it did infuse a new lenitude into their relations. They looked at each other across the gulf between them with a distant gentleness.

CHAPTER XX

AFTER Phil's death all the maternal affection Francesca had lavished on the little boy reverted to Anne ; and Anne did not seem to want it, she seemed to shrink from all emotional experience as a scalded child from hot water. She made new interests in her life, made new friends easily, and not all her new friends commended themselves to Francesca's judgment.

Anne's success astonished Francesca : it was incredible to her that anyone could take her little sister-in-law's work as seriously as she took it herself. It was difficult for her to think of Anne's eternal preoccupation over the superficialities of fashion with approval, or even patience, yet impossible not to regard the financial results with respect. Her mind was divided between her loyalty to Anne, which tempted her to smile upon her extravagances, and her loyalty to somewhat rigid principles which condemned such frivolous activities as waste of time and talent. Her vision of Gilbert and Anne being drawn nearer together by their sorrow proved to be only a mirage she had conjured up in her own brain to fill the dreary emptiness left in her own future. Her heart ached for both of them, but they seemed to have each decided to sail different ships, and Francesca watched them steering their own course,

getting caught in different currents that took them farther and farther apart. She admired and envied the indomitable courage with which Anne fought her grief with hard work, not allowing herself to look back or brood despondently, but she deplored the form the hard work took. She confided her misgivings to Marian Wyndham, whom she met one afternoon in Anne's studio, where some finished sketches were on view.

"I suppose I'm an illogical Philistine," she said. "But I don't like these things Anne does; though my common sense tells me that if people will pay ten guineas to possess a thing like that I ought to be reconciled to her doing it."

The thing was an original colour-drawing for one of the figures from the Assyrian Ballet, which had been a great success. Anne had reaped her share of advertisement. The dresses were original and daring: incorrect, according to some supercilious critics, "quite correct enough for their purpose," according to an amused Assyriologist, whom Anne had beguiled into defending her in a bantering correspondence in the Press.

Marian, with her shabby hat on the back of her untidy fair head, surveyed the sketches with a critical eye.

"Anne's work is uncommonly clever in its way. It is so cheerful and gay, and . . . and cheeky."

"I don't know what it all means," complained Francesca. "And I've a feeling that if I did know I shouldn't like it."

"They don't mean anything, any more than Anne's flirtations mean anything. They just happen because she'd be bored if they didn't. You might

just as well criticise the mediæval illuminators who painted rabbits and birds and butterflies in the borders of missals and breviaries. They've nothing to do with the text, they are there because it pleased the artist to put them there. That is why they are so perfectly satisfying. These delicious absurdities of Anne's are in the same category. I couldn't paint these flighty little demoniacal beings in mad clothes to save my life. And I should feel a fool in her high-heeled shoes and silk stockings."

Marian smiled benignly upon Anne, who was absorbed in a mild flirtation with a dealer at the other end of the room.

"Bless her, I've no doubt she's an awful handful!"

"The worst of it is she isn't," sighed Francesca. "A 'handful' implies at least a restraining hand, and that is just what nobody has where Anne is concerned."

Francesca deliberately lingered till everyone else had gone. She imagined Anne would return with her to Chelsea, but Anne had other plans. She was dining with Austin Heddle.

"That man!" exclaimed Francesca.

"He amuses me," explained Anne: she appeared to think that settled it.

"I've just heard that John is seriously ill with rheumatic fever," said Francesca. The mischievous smile died on Anne's lips.

"Will *he* die too?" she cried almost impatiently.

"No, I don't think it kills people."

"I'll telegraph to him, and say how sorry I am."

"You know he's not allowed letters except . . ."

"Telegrams aren't letters. I'll send it care of the

Governor, and unless he's a beast he'll let him have it. Come with me to the post office."

Anne wrote out a long telegram that cost her fourteen shillings. Francesca made an almost mechanical frugal remonstrance.

"I don't care," said Anne. "I'm not going to bother about cutting out halfpennies when poor John is so ill. Besides, it may amuse him."

"You're so erratic. You haven't troubled to write to him once since he's been there, and now, look at you!"

"What is the use of writing letters to a man in hell?"

"Anne dear!"

"Well, being in prison must be hell. It is a rotten world. Sometimes I'm glad Phil is safe out of it all. At least people can't be unjust to him and make him miserable, and at least he can't grow up into a man and be beastly himself and make other people miserable."

"You're tired, child. Come home to dinner, and send another wire to Mr. Heddle to say you can't come."

"I shan't do anything of the sort. I'm not tired. I'm only not a child! You're always wanting me to do, or say, or be, something different."

Anne's voice was vibrant with nervous impatience. Francesca was not prepared to quarrel in the post office. She went home in a despondent mood. Having failed to rouse in Anne anything but antagonism, she made a conscientious effort to produce a more satisfactory result by experimenting on Gilbert.

"Anne is dining with Austin Heddle."

"Is she?"

"Yes. I do so dislike that man."

"He is an unmitigated bounder; an affected brute too. I don't know how Anne can stick him."

"Gilbert, do you think it wise to let Anne dine out alone with unmitigated bounders? She is so young and so very attractive."

"Anne is quite capable of taking care of herself."

"Of course it is very nice that you have such infinite trust in her, but don't you think it looks as if you didn't care about her reputation?"

"Never you fear, she'll soon be tired of him. All Anne cares about is getting her own way and having a good time. She isn't the type to lose her head over a man like Heddle, or any other man if it comes to that."

"Perhaps not, unless she happened to lose her heart first."

"You may leave Anne's heart out of your calculations. I don't say she hasn't got one somewhere. But she takes jolly good care of it, and with the small amount of work it gets, and the restful life she leads it, it will last her all her time. She has one of those cold, calculating temperaments that keep women out of mischief."

"All I know is that she usen't to be such a little beast."

"She isn't a little beast, she's a very pretty, fascinating young woman, and she jolly well knows it, and gets the most she can out of it; and as long as she can get whatever she happens to want out of anyone by smiling at them she'll continue to smile, and that's all they will get out of it. And if anyone is such a blamed fool as to play into her hands I don't blame her; but I'm not such a fool as to

worry about her, and I'd advise you not to either. Whatever happens to anybody else, Anne will turn up smiling."

Francesca was silenced, and went unhappily to bed. The next day she returned to Crane Hall, and tried to fill her life with various interests, with local organisations, the financial affairs of the Warneford Children's Hospital, the cultivation of her garden, and the social administration of the village. The multitudinous activities took up her time and filled her life, and she could always fill her house with friends and acquaintances; but the innermost citadel of her heart was empty. However much she disapproved of Anne, she had to acknowledge to herself that she possessed the quality of making more admirable people seem rather dull; it was unfair, but there it was. She was like some strange exotic flavour that, once a taste for it was acquired, made other wine seem flat or insipid. You wanted to shake her, not with any hope of shaking away faults, but with the motive with which one shakes up a kaleidoscope.

With the flowers Francesca laid always on Phil's little grave she laid her dreams and regrets for her own widowed childlessness. The fidelity to the memory of the adored husband of her girlhood had brought her a proud reticent serenity of soul; for human companionship she had counted on Gilbert, then on Anne, and on Phil. Now, she moved about the house and garden mentally peopling it with the little children the old rooms, the old trees, seemed to be there for—Gilbert and Anne's children. Everything seemed to be wasted. The roses climbed up and looked in at the barred wide windows, where no

little rosy faces looked out. The wide smooth lawns seemed empty. Sometimes she was sad, and sometimes impatient. But in every human mind lurks a gambler. We take the most absurd chances, or make the most amazing calculations, and endure periods of depression that do not degenerate into despair simply because of the gambler's inveterate cheerful assumption that something may rescue us, even by diverting the laws of the universe if necessary. The most unselfish of mortals are egoists in their demands on whatever gods they worship. Half unconsciously, Francesca looked forward to John Halliday's release from prison, because he might be able to induce Anne to modify her conduct. At least he had been able to extract a promise from Anne not to renew her Paris experiment. She began to count the months that would bring the end of his sentence, and to make detailed plans for his benefit. She would invite him to Crane Hall, and together they would talk out the problem Anne presented, and discuss ways and means of dealing with her. But it happened that when John came out of prison Francesca was in Edinburgh, for he was released unexpectedly for reasons of ill-health. It was Juliet Dalliac who met him at the station and drove him back with her to Brooke Street. Her kind heart was shocked by his appearance. He was thin and bent, and he looked twenty years older. Her brown eyes filled with tears as she greeted him.

"I shall be all right soon," he explained. "I had rheumatic fever pretty badly; pulls one down. It is awfully good of you, Mrs. Dalliac, but I can't come back with you, you know, or see people, I'm a ticket-of-leave."

"That's all right," said Juliet gently. "William or Lawrence will see the Home Secretary, and get it altered to a pardon. Of course you must come and be taken care of for a little while. I'm all alone with the children. You shall see nobody, if you don't want to."

"I'm feeling a bit dazed," he explained when he was having tea in the library, numbed with the strange realisation of the little details of his liberty. He held the Worcester china teacup clumsily, it seemed so absurdly light and fragile, like a doll's cup; and the deep-cushioned arm-chair was so fantastically luxurious.

"How is everybody?" he enquired shyly.

"Very well. My husband will be in presently. And Anne is in Cornwall motoring with the Freynes."

"Is she all right?"

"She was very well when I saw her last. Another cup of tea? Oh, here come the children. Will they bother you?"

"Rather not," said John.

Three demure little girls in white frocks came in, followed by a nurse carrying a baby.

"You've not seen my youngest of course," said Juliet. "Anne's goddaughter, Helen Elizabeth. She is nine months, and ought to have been a little boy, only she is so sweet I shouldn't have the heart to change her."

"May I hold her?" asked John. "Will she mind? You can't think how I've missed seeing children."

Helen Elizabeth was transferred to John's knee. He held her awkwardly enough, crumpling her crisp white frock, but with a tenderness that the baby appreciated, for she laughed at him, and patted his thin grey face with a fat hand, and made soft con-

tented noises like a young wood-pigeon. Juliet was so touched by the way his rough, hardened fingers caressed the soft downy curls that she forebore to interfere when he began to feed the baby with crumbs of bread and butter. The embarrassment in the air—for there had been embarrassment—melted away. When William Dalliach came home, Juliet held up a warning finger.

“Hush!”

The baby was fast asleep in John's arms, and John was asleep too.

CHAPTER XXI

ANNE did not hear of John's release until she returned to London. By that time he was a free man, William Dalliac had presented his case to the Home Office and had procured him a free pardon. He had declined the Dalliacs' invitation to stay with them until he was strong enough for work. He found that his rooms in the Euston Road were vacant and he took them again. And there Anne found him one hot afternoon in July. She had telegraphed to say she was coming. He had prepared tea for her on the rickety table in the dingy, shabby little sitting-room on the first floor.

"John! How ill you look!"

He laughed at her horrified face.

"You don't know how well I feel!—to be out!—back here again!—having you come to tea with me!—Anne, it is like being in Heaven."

"Poor John! Tell me all about it—or is it too dreadful to speak about?"

"Lord no! it wasn't *so* dreadful—at first of course I felt horribly down—but on the whole they were very decent to me, the officials you know—awfully kind when I was so ill—I'm not pretending I enjoyed it, or that I don't want to forget it all as speedily as possible. . . ."

"Then don't talk about it. . . ."

"It is like a mental and spiritual attack of rheumatic fever—hurts, you know. Let's talk about other things. . . . But first, Anne dear, I want to tell you I'd have gone through it all again, indefinitely, to have spared you your sorrow about Phil. . . ."

Anne's lips trembled.

"I know," she said. "John—I'm getting used to the idea now. At first I really used to catch myself hoping that he'd be very naughty and that they'd send him back—just as if he'd gone to school." She caught her breath with a little sob. Then she sat down and looked at John with a growing horror in her eyes—at the lines of pain in his aged grey face, his sunken eyes, his thin hands. She glanced around the hot, uncomfortable little room.

"You can't stay here! You're not well enough. You must . . ."

"It is all right. I'm going away to Ireland for a bit. I'm not ill now. Of course I'm not exactly a Hercules yet—they don't let you out of gaol for reasons of health if you are. But don't let's talk about my aches and pains. There are such tons of things I want to tell you and ask you. It is good enough to be here, watching you pour out tea. Tell me all your news first."

"I haven't much. Everything is much the same. Francesca is in Edinburgh, comes back in a day or two. You've seen Gilbert; and I'm flourishing."

"How's the work?"

"Oh—I've been doing quite well. I'm rather the fashion."

"Gilbert said you were a success."

The conversation dropped dead. John was leaning

back in his chair smiling happily as he watched Anne.

“Are you tired?” she asked. “Shall I go?”

“Go! why you’ve only just come—I’m only just beginning to realise you. Let me stare at you in comfort: it is so long since I’ve seen pretty clothes—and they’re all a different shape since I last saw them.”

“Why and when are you going to Ireland?”

“I go to-morrow; the ‘why’ of it is rather more complicated—I’ll tell you—I want to tell you, only there is so much that I don’t know where to begin. There was an Irish padre who was awfully kind when I was ill—he’s given me the address of an inn to go to. I wasn’t his job really, because I was entered as Church of England, but before the trial I met an old priest, Father Meredith; this man was a friend of his—he asked him to do what he could for me.”

“John, what did you do all the time?”

“They put me on to the printing—there’s a lot of printing done at Parkhurst: and I said that was my line. I was quite useful—and then I thought a lot. I had more time for thinking than I’ve ever had before.”

“That must have been the worst part—it would have driven me mad thinking how unjust it all was.”

“I dare say it would have driven me mad if I’d concentrated on that, it doesn’t work—to go on thinking about oneself and one’s own troubles. It just leads one’s brain round in circles, and after a bit it isn’t even interesting.”

“Then what did you think about?”

“Oh, everything in Heaven or earth! I thought

of you, and everyone I knew and cared for, and I thought about life, and death, and truth, and the meaning of the universe, and about God—and everything I'd ever read or felt. I've learnt a lot in prison. I used to be rather attracted by the modern craze of 'toleration,' for condoning sin—preventing it if possible, if not, regarding it with great tenderness. I've heard awfully clever men and women argue as if sin were a sort of disease that could be cured or prevented by drugs, as if there were no spirit of evil to be fought. I know better now. I've seen men who have made themselves into human devils by sin. Sin isn't just a vacuum caused in the human soul by the absence of mild virtues, it is terrifying filthy cruelty. Political philanthropists talk as if sin could be cured by dosing sinners with good wages and cheap amusements and physical comfort—awful rot you know. I tried to straighten everything out, all the tangled threads of the thoughts and dreams and perplexities, all the ideas that we take up and play with like children with toys, and tire of and leave in an untidy muddle in one's mind. I tried to reconstruct something out of all the philosophy I'd ever read, something that would have hope and faith and charity in it. I took all the bits I liked and tried to piece them together; but they wouldn't all fit, and when they did fit there didn't seem to be any meaning in it. It was like one of those windows you sometimes see in churches, made of broken bits of the beautiful old stained glass that has been shattered; the window is there, and the original fine colours, but there is no more sense or pattern than there is in a kaleidoscope. . . . Am I boring you ? ”

“No—go on. Did anything come?”

“Not at first. I tried talking theology with the chaplain, but I’d read so much more than he had that he couldn’t help much. You see I’ve read and been bitten by all the rationalists. I saturated myself with their arguments—their point of view, the good and the bad ones. He thought I was presumptuous, he didn’t see what I was getting at, and fancied I must be trying to crab his creed. He was a pleasant little chap too—very kind; lent me theological books when he found I was sincere; and he was broad-minded too. We discussed all the modern “isms” that are. He was as interested in them as a terrier might be in a new species of rat—he was a good orthodox Christian. Then came my rheumatic fever—I nearly died, I think, but they pulled me through. When I was getting better I had a queer vivid dream. I dreamed I was alone in a wild, open country—rather like the moors where I used to take you for walks when I first had you. There were hills and heather, and I was alone searching for Truth. I’d got the old adage in my mind that Truth lived at the bottom of a well, and I was digging a well to find it—to find Truth. I went on digging away right down, and I came upon nothing but earth and great stones, and then water and mud, and then more and more mud. I was determined to persevere: in my dream I knew that if I kept on I should find Truth. So I went further and further down to the dark bowels of the earth, and still I found nothing but mud and stones till my heart began to despair; but I kept on, and at last, after æons of time it seemed to me, I felt something was coming. I *knew* I was getting near to

Truth. I was all in the darkness then you know, my well had become a great deep mine. Suddenly I went down a bit further and I saw light. I was coming to the end, I broke through into daylight. And there, after the darkness, was Truth—and it was the luminous everyday sky with the stars! I had bored right through the world! and my first feeling was one of tremendous joy and relief at discovering Truth. Then came the realisation that I had been a fool, for I'd had the sky and the stars overhead on the other side where I'd started from, if I'd only looked up, instead of boring down through all that mud and darkness. But when I woke up I liked the dream: it had comforted me tremendously."

"Did it help you?"

"Yes. It helped me to make up my mind. It helped me to see that Truth can't be a matter of wisdom and learning and esoteric knowledge, it must be there like the fresh air and the stars overhead, just as much for children as for tired old philosophers—otherwise it wouldn't be fair. That made everything simpler."

"In what way?"

"Straightens things out. The choice really lies between the simple belief in Christianity with all its intellectual mysteries and difficulties accepted by faith, or a woolly-minded sort of theism without a creed at all—a hybrid between materialism and spiritualism."

"I don't know what I believe. It is rather comfortable to have an elastic faith without any dogma to bother one's brain."

"Comfortable perhaps—but is it comforting? It seems to me that a faith without dogma is like a

human being without a skeleton—might be quite handsome to look at, and quite kind and amiable, but it would be a bit flabby when you came to request it to do a day's work. After all a creed, like everything else in the world, has presumably got to *work*. Not much use it being consistent and rational and undemanding if it won't. Men's souls are made for mysteries, and you can't feed them by pretending mysteries don't exist, or by giving them cheap substitutes—might as well feed babies on cheap substitutes for milk, they'd grow up sickly wasters if they didn't die off young. If men don't feed on the great logical mysteries they take to petty little illogical ones, superstitions like savages. Do you see where I've drifted ? ”

Anne shook her head. “ Not quite.”

“ Back to Catholicism——”

“ You don't mean you've become a Roman Catholic ? ”

“ Yes ; it is the only logical form of Christianity there is ; the others are all compromises—compromises with the secular spirit of different ages, compromises with men's transient difficulties.”

“ What do you mean ? ”

“ I think I mean that the real cleavage between Catholicism and every other creed is over the faith in the resurrection of the *body*. The immortality of the soul, or spirit, yes ! they'll all, or nearly all, believe so far : but the immortality of the body—that is where their belief stops. Now mine doesn't. I believe that when I reach Heaven and meet you it will be all of you, all that I love in you. A *ghost* of you, a misty wraith of your mind, and your mental and moral qualities, and your opinions, and

ideas, wouldn't do at all. Unless you looked at me through your blue eyes and laughed with your lips and spoke with your voice and held out your hands, I should feel cheated out of part of you. Now God doesn't cheat—can't; so if we're promised immortality at all it must be an immortality that's really worth while having. I don't want to blow about the universe for ever in a state of pure spirit, which is what the modern school has arranged to do—nobody does really! Do you?"

"No! and if I ever meet Phil again I shan't want an angel baby, I shall want my little boy."

"Yes, with his own little fair rough head and his bright eyes. Well, that doctrine of the resurrection of the body is what the modernists have thrown overboard because they can't understand it."

"But John" . . . Anne was troubled. "You've got to believe such a lot if you're a Roman Catholic."

"I know what you mean, you want to accept the spirit and dispense with the matter. Don't you see you might just as well ask trees to bear leaves and flowers and fruit and deny them their right to their roots in the earth?"

"No, I don't see," said Anne. "But I'm not going to quarrel with you about religion. If it makes you happy to be a Catholic or a Mahommedan or a Methodist, why you must be one. I shall like you just as much."

John looked unsatisfied.

"Your toleration isn't a proof of your affection for me. It only proves you don't care a bit about the subject." He thought that Anne looked troubled so he changed the conversation.

"I heard the other day that Molly Campbell has married a cousin of hers up in Scotland. I was very glad of course."

"Were you?"

There was a suggestion of distant polite scepticism in Anne's voice.

John's face flushed.

"I say, Anne . . . you—you never thought that—believed that . . . I . . . that I'd made love to that poor girl, did you?"

"She was a very pretty girl. . . ."

"I never did!"

"You needn't be so fierce! I don't see much harm in it if you had."

"But I didn't, Anne. It wasn't true! It was horrible to imagine you might be thinking that. You didn't believe it—did you?"

"I rather think I did—but I didn't believe anything bad of you, John. Why do you look at me as if I'd hurt you?"

"Because it does hurt. . . . I've not achieved much, I've made a failure of everything, but at least I've kept faith with my own ideal. I've always loved you—never cared for anyone else—I thought you understood, at least wouldn't misjudge me."

Anne flushed crimson, and John leaned forward and laid his thin hand gently on hers.

"It is all right, Anne dear. I thought you knew. Anyway you know now. I've loved you ever since you were a little girl. It has been an enormous happiness to me, and it doesn't hurt you! I'm so used to it that it is quite natural to speak about it. What is the matter?"

Anne's eyes were misty.

"You've been so unselfish, John, and I've given you so little!"

"You've given me no end. You don't know what you've meant to me, and what you always will mean. All my day-dreams are wound round you. They always have been; you've always been the Princess in my castles in Spain. I should have been a very lonely beggar without you in my life. As it is I've always had you to think about and care for and always shall have as long as I live. Whenever things have gone badly with me I've cheered myself up by playing the games we used to play, you and I, when you were a kid. Do you remember we used to play that we were very clever people, working together, growing rich and important? Anne! I wouldn't have told you if I'd dreamed it would make you look like that! I thought it would amuse you and make you laugh!"

"It doesn't make me laugh," she said. "I want to cry. It is all so unfair! You've had nothing out of life—nothing but injustice. If I'd been sent to prison there might have been some sense in it, I've got a dreadful temper!—but you get into a rage just once and you're punished for it!—And you've had nothing you want and are grateful to me, and other people have everything they want, and success, and aren't even satisfied."

She spoke tempestuously.

"You needn't cry, my dear!" he said gently. "And you needn't get in a temper about it!" He took her hand and kissed it, held it against his cheek. "I'm a very lucky fellow really. The one thing I dreaded was dying in prison. Well, I got better and I'm let out. You're here, and I've a peaceful con-

viction that I shall finish my book and make a much better job of it than I should have done before."

"You're not strong enough to work yet."

"I shall be when I come back from Ireland—fresh air and proper food and exercise will put me right."

Anne didn't look as if she were listening.

"When do you start?"

"To-morrow night. I think the Irish mail goes at eight from Euston. I go via Holyhead and Kings-town, and then on, to the Wicklow Mountains. I want to be among hills, and I want to be in a Catholic country. I've a yearning almost as if something were calling me to go—otherwise I'd like to stay in London to be near you. But I shall enjoy London much more when I'm fit to stand the noises and the general racket, and I hardly dared hope you'd be here. I thought you'd be away for the summer. What are your plans?"

"I've not made any—yet. I must go now. You look dreadfully tired, and I'm going out to dinner. I won't say good-bye, I shall see you to-morrow. . . ."

"When?" John was puzzled. "Will you come to tea again?"

"No. I shall be too busy."

John made his simple preparations for his journey at leisure the next day. He packed his portmanteau, half filling it with books, and later found he was not strong enough to carry it to the station; the effort to do so racked him with pain. He yielded it to a half-grown boy of about fourteen who was desirous of being a mentor as well as a porter. John gathered from the expressions of kindly interest that the lad thought he was drunk.

"That's orl right, guv'nor. You give *me* the bag.

Oi'll carry it safe as houses for yer. Just you follow me. Know which station you want? Three of 'em along this 'ere road, Euston, King's Cross, an' St. Pancras. . . . Euston is it? Thet ain't no distance, carry it fer sixpence! Got your money handy for yer ticket?"

"Yes thanks, sonny, and I've not been drinking. I'm ill—rheumatism—that's what's the matter with me."

"Get a bottle o' medicine at the chemist's shop, guv'nor. Mother, she 'as rheumatism somethink cruel she does, an' I fetches her some stuff in a bottle that does her a power o' good; rubs it in, she does, but one day she took and drunk it and said it did a lot more good inside than out."

"I think I'll take your advice. I don't want my holiday in Ireland spoilt." He went into a chemist's shop in Gower Street, chaperoned by the boy who, on the strength of his mother's experiences, took a professional interest in the matter.

"I'm suffering from rheumatism," explained John to the man in the shop. "Can you give me anything to keep the pain away?"

"Liniment, sir?"

The man peered through his spectacles at a dusty array of patent medicines in straight waistcoats of cardboard.

"No-o—I don't think I want to be bothered to rub things in. It is all through me, you know. Something to take would be simpler."

"Salicylic acid?" suggested the man.

"I should think so. You know more about it than I do probably."

The chemist, after some short absence out of sight

behind the counter, produced a neatly sealed package in white paper.

“One-and-nine, sir, please.”

“Now if that does me any good,” said John to his companion, “it is much cheaper and simpler than going to a doctor.”

“My muvver, she says, she don’t ’old with doctors—give ’er a bottle o’ somethink anyday an’ she’s ’appy, she says. When it comes to cuttin’ off arms and legs, w’y you’ve got to ’ave a doctor, she says, seein’ as that’s wot they’re trained to: but w’en it comes to pain inside or such-like, wot do doctors know? Nuffin’ but wot you tells ’em yourself, she says. An’ oo’s likely to know best about medicine, she says, a man as just writes it down somethin’ shockin’ on a piece of paper, or the man in the shop wot mixes it? W’y the man wot mixes it hisself, she says. ’E knows what ’e puts in it, she says, which is more’n what the doctor does.”

Between the weight of the bag and his own loquacity the boy was breathless.

“I like your faith in your mother, my boy,” said John. “You stick to it.” He took his ticket, made the boy happy by giving him a shilling instead of the sixpence which he had expected, bought an evening paper, and secured a corner seat. Then he had leisure to watch the arrival of fellow-passengers and speculate upon the chances of keeping his carriage to himself.

A few minutes before the scheduled time for the train’s departure a porter, carrying a leather suitcase and a travelling-bag, stopped at the door of his carriage, and behind the porter was Anne. She was not wearing the clothes he had seen her in the after-

noon before, her small hat had a brim which half hid her face, and her coat had a high collar; he did not recognise her until she said:

"Oh, here you are!" and got into the carriage.

"Anne! How perfectly angelic of you to come and see me off."

She leaned back in the corner seat opposite him and tipped the porter who had stowed the bags in the rack.

"I'm coming with you," she said.

"You're coming with me?"

"Yes, to Ireland."

"To Ireland?"

He was so astonished he could only repeat her words after her.

"Yes. I—I meant to yesterday—but I didn't tell you because I hadn't quite arranged it all in my mind." She lifted her veil and pulled off her gloves, and she smiled at him happily and mysteriously.

"Don't ask any more questions just now," she said; "there'll be heaps of time for explanations. Just try to get over your surprise, and look pleased."

"But—am't I looking pleased?"

"No, you're looking dazed."

"That's exactly what I feel—of course it is too jolly for words, but——"

At this moment the agitated guard threw open their carriage, pushed in an excited man, and shut the door after him as the train steamed out of the station. The new-comer settled down at the opposite end of the carriage and began to explain how he had nearly missed the train: the gist of his views seemed to be that the hotel porters and the cabdrivers of London were leagued in a perpetual

conspiracy to make all travellers miss every train on all occasions. He was a communicative individual, an Irish landowner from Armagh. He had been buying cattle in England, and became lyrical over the beauties of the pedigree stock he had grazing at Drumnagoon and invited them both to see them if they were contemplating a visit to Belfast. He rather lost interest in them as an audience when Anne informed him they were going to Wicklow. When he pulled the *Strand Magazine* out of his overcoat pocket and began to read, Anne took off her hat, curled up on the seat and went to sleep. John had to wake her at Holyhead.

On board the *Munster*, when Anne had found a berth in the ladies' cabin, he lay down in the saloon and tried to compose himself to think more calmly than had been possible in the train in her presence; then he had only been able to watch her unconscious face: he had puzzled the Ulsterman by gazing at her with an unwearying intensity, like a gaunt, sombre guardian angel. Now, alone, stretched out on the red velvet couch he began to collect his thoughts—but he was worn out and astonished himself by falling into a deep untroubled sleep. When he woke up and went on deck they were in sight of Ireland which, in the early morning mist, lay like an amethyst island in an opalescent sea. Anne was on deck, standing by the rail, and he went to her.

"Isn't it lovely?" she said. "It is like a fairy island in a dream. We've left everything behind—we'll forget everything and be perfectly happy."

He put his arm through hers and said:

"I was stunned last night—and now I'm just as incapable of thinking or speaking or realising any-

thing but that you're here with me. I can't say a word of what's in my heart—there is some happiness that is so exquisite and sharp that it is almost pain—almost beyond bearing. It is all so like a dream that I'm terrified of waking up and finding myself back in prison."

"Don't, John. I really can't bear it!"

Her eyes were clouded with tears as she looked up at him. He was aware that she was subtly evading the questions he wanted to ask, and, as he found it difficult to frame the questions, he put them by for the moment. Anne was with him, was apparently intending to come with him all the way to Wicklow—and she did not wish to be asked how she had conceived or achieved this. He could only accept her decision as he accepted his own surprise and happiness—with awed, inarticulate surprise and joy. Anne was touched and amused by his attitude of perplexed and tender reverence; he behaved as if she were a rare and beautiful bird who had escaped from a cage and might fly from his hands if he startled her; yet when the boat reached Kingstown she had to do everything practical. John would have lost sight and trace of their luggage, and made automatically for the first train that he saw, regarding not its ultimate destination. She supervised their porter and made necessary enquiries. A fellow-passenger, a middle-aged Irishwoman, overheard her questioning the stationmaster and drew her aside, volunteering information.

"Don't you be asking the officials, my dear—they'll surely mislead you. I'm going beyond there myself. I know the ways of those south trains."

Anne concluded that in Ireland the trains had

ideas and wills of their own and disdained the directions of their hireling uniformed shepherds. Their self-appointed guide took them into her kindly charge.

While they were waiting for breakfast she whispered to Anne.

“Your husband looks very ill.”

Anne started, coloured vividly and looked at John. Then her colour fled, for his lips were blue and she thought he was fainting. The strange woman fumbled in her travelling-basket and brought out a flask full of brandy, made John drink some. He recovered and smiled reassuringly at Anne’s scared face.

“I’m all right. Only the rheumatic fever left my heart weak—I get these attacks, but they go off.”

The stranger took the explanation to herself and was inclined to pursue the subject of the illness with all a kind-hearted woman’s interest, but Anne warded off the enquiries and tried to take care of John—to treat him as an invalid; she was frightened by his evident weakness, and felt helpless and unhappy.

“You’ll be all right when we get there, won’t you?” she asked wistfully and uncertainly, much as she had been wont to try and extract a promise from Phil that he would be good.

“Yes, of course I shall,” he assured her.

The strange woman took them under her charge regarding them with benevolent concern; also she was pleased to have an English audience with whom to discuss Irish politics as they breakfasted together while they waited for the train; she seemed to think the English nation lacked intelligence on the subject of Ireland.

"It isn't that," John explained. "It is lack of interest. The average Englishman can't see that Ireland is of much importance, and the Irishman can't see that anything else is."

"We think they're ungrateful," explained Anne. "We do try to be kind and it doesn't seem any use."

"You've put your finger on it! The English mean to be kind and expect gratitude. That is what the Irish cannot stand. They don't want to be accepting kindnesses, they're that generous and proud-hearted they want to be doing the kindnesses themselves."

The Irishwoman shepherded them to the train and travelled with them: they seemed to her a singularly pathetic couple, delicate, young, and forlorn.

"Bringing a sick man into the wilds of Ireland without as much as a drop of brandy between them, the creatures!" she murmured to herself. She regretted when they got out at Rathgorm; they so obviously needed some motherly, elderly, sensible person to go with them to take care of them.

CHAPTER XXII

THEY drove eight miles in a side-car through the Wicklow hills to Ballytyrone, eight long, lonely, lovely miles, with the wide wind-swept space round them purple with heather and encircled by intensely blue hills—range upon range of hills where winds and clouds gathered, brewing into storms like smoke in a giant's cauldron. They passed two little villages, handfuls of tiny white cottages, scattered along the road like crumbs of food for the great invisible winged spirits that surely dwelt among the mountains. The shadows of the clouds that passed over the empty valleys seemed but the echo of their brooding presences.

Their journey ended by the edge of a small lake. The lake was almost surrounded by mountains rising straight out of the water, but at one end of it the valley opened, and there was a little church and a few whitewashed cottages with thatched roofs. At the foot of a steep hill there was one small grey stone house, and at the door, over which was a board which announced that the proprietor's name was Patrick Kavanagh, the horse stopped. A rosy-faced woman, who was Mrs. Patrick Kavanagh, came out to greet them. She seemed surprised to see John's companion on the car, for he had not mentioned any when he wrote to engage rooms, but she hospitably welcomed Anne when he explained :

"Mrs. Trevor has come with me—I hope you can do with a lady as well?"

"Surely we can, and bless her pretty face! As soon as Mary Ursula has the pigs fed she'll make a room dacent and nate for you, ma'am. And I'll have a good cup o' tay ready for you both this minute. And thin, if it is all night you've been tossing and heaving on thim boats, it is a bit of steady rest you'll be needing, God help you!"

A small garden sloped down from the side of the inn to the lake edge, a garden surrounded by a low fuchsia hedge aglow with scarlet and purple flowers. An apple tree shaded a corner of the square grass plot, and bees droned over some bushes of white phlox.

"What a heavenly place!" Anne exclaimed as she stood in the sun-flecked shadow of the apple tree and looked over the flower hedge to the lake and the hills beyond.

"You don't think it will be too rough for you?" John asked with an anxious glance at the inn.

"No; besides, what does it matter? Look! there's a boat on the lake; we'll have it out after we've rested, and explore the mountains the other side. Only you must rest first. You're an invalid, and I'm nursing you."

John, worn out by the journey, the long drive, and by his own perplexities and emotions, lay down on the grass in the sun-flecked shade of the apple tree. So far he had not had Anne to himself. There had been their fellow-travellers on the journey, then Michael Henry, the driver. Anne had talked to Michael Henry all the way, trying to extract information about the neighbourhood, a difficult process,

for he was a silent, taciturn young man. Now she was making friends with Mrs. Kavanagh indoors. He could wait. He lit a cigarette and lazily watched a heron rise among the reeds that fringed the lake and fly across to a grove of trees, and he wondered whether Heaven had any more perfect contentment and beauty: the glory of the mountains, the sapphire blue distances seen over the purple hedge, and the white phlox, the cool sound of the lake water lapping the shore, Anne's voice in the distance. He slept, and when he opened his eyes an hour or two later they rested on Anne, Anne radiant in a thin blue dress, without her hat, gathering sprays of flowers for the table Mrs. Kavanagh was spreading for lunch in the garden.

"This is just perfect," John remarked suddenly. "These mountains are like the Kingdom of God—'for Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory. . . .' Somehow pictures and geography books give us two-dimensional mountains, height and length of their range; but they're so thick through—their breadth and depth—that's their strength and fascination. I don't ever want to go back. This is too exquisite. It is like some music that is so piercingly beautiful it feels as if it were going to break through something, some barrier, and let one straight through to another world. You can't bear it to stop, yet you can hardly bear the beauty of it going on. You want it to stand still for a moment. That is what I feel now. I want time, and all this beauty, and you, to stand still. The moments are slipping away before I've drunk them all in, and they are so full. Perfection is almost pain because one can't really bear it. All this would have been sweet enough

if I'd been alone—but with you, it is just heavenly ! ” He roused himself from his reverie with a sudden effort. “ But how has it come about ? What did Gilbert say to you coming ? ”

“ Nothing. I didn't tell him.”

“ Didn't *tell* him ? ”

“ No. I've left a letter for Francesca. She'll tell him.”

“ Are you sure he won't mind ? ”

“ It is nothing to me whether he minds or not.”

John laughed uneasily.

“ It is all very well being so high and mighty, Anne dear, but don't you think we'd better write to him ? I—I don't want there to be any risk of a row when you get back ! ”

Anne stared at him.

“ But I'm not going back ! ”

“ Not going back ? ”

“ No. I've run away ! And as it is no fun running away by one's self, I've run away with you ! ” She laughed rather nervously, and held out her hand. “ D'you mind ? ”

“ Mind ? ” He kept her hand, kissed it, and laid his cheek against it. “ My dear ! But you don't expect me to exult if happiness for me is being bought at too great a price, and at your cost. You see, Anne dearest, I don't understand.”

“ It is all quite simple. Gilbert and I made a failure of our marriage. While Phil was alive there was some point in keeping up appearances—now there isn't. We—we haven't meant anything to each other for a long time. I—I've been awfully unhappy, really. Gilbert never cared, and so . . . now I know you do. . . .”

John's face was rather grim.

"Do you mean Gilbert was unfaithful to you?"

Anne's mouth quivered, and she nodded.

"I suppose I could have divorced him if I'd wanted to, only I didn't want to. There was Phil, and I should have hated it all so much. Now," she shrugged her shoulders, "I've finished with it all. Gilbert can do what he likes."

"But, my dear!"

"Don't look so distressed, John."

"I'm thinking of you. I want you to be happy. I can't bear you to make such a hash of life."

"That's all right. We're going to be happy. Nothing that happens to me now can hurt me any more. John, why didn't you make me marry you when I was seventeen?"

"What had I to offer you?"

"Your love, your faith, your friendship. John, so far I have brought you nothing but worry. I do want to make it up to you!"

John had risen and moved a step away from her. He was standing looking out over the lake. He turned as Anne came to him, drew her into his arms, and laid his lips on hers. They kissed each other once, then Anne released herself.

"Let's go on the lake," she suggested.

Michael Henry, who had driven them from the station, asked nothing better than to row them in the clumsy, paintless boat which John was not strong enough to propel.

"The garden can weed itself," he said.

John always behaved as if Anne were a very precious charge, but he was especially gentle this afternoon; his manner was that of a tender-hearted

adult towards a very young child. He puzzled her : she felt it almost galling, after she had taken such a very mature and advanced step in life as leaving her husband and eloping with him, to be treated as if she were a baby.

“ Almost as if he were afraid of me falling out of the boat,” she said to herself. Yet she couldn’t resent his chivalrous tenderness in which there was no patronage or masterfulness, only an awed reverence.

And John fancied that behind Anne’s gaiety that afternoon was defiance—defiance not of him, but of something more remote and intangible, as if she were keeping something at arm’s length, challenging something that threatened to frustrate her will. She was exerting all her will-power, all her charm, to make him happy, to be happy herself.

Michael Henry rowed them about the lake between the purple and green mountains themselves and their reflections in the smooth, bright water ; but they could not talk intimately under his steady benign gaze, so John suggested they should land at the southern side of the lake and walk back. The boat was pushed in on a little shore of white sand, where the steep hills ended upon a soft lawn of moss and ferns and short fine grass. Michael Henry helped them out. After his long scrutiny of them both, he had evidently decided to take his orders from Anne, for he said :

“ And whin shall I tell Mrs. Kavanagh, ma’am, that you and your brother will be wanting your tea ? ”

Anne answered vaguely, and, as the boat pushed off, she glanced quickly through her lashes at John.

“ You introduced me on the scene as Mrs. Trevor,”

she reminded him. "They've taken it for granted I'm your sister."

"Just as well," said John placidly. "No need to undeceive them."

He winced with pain as he moved.

"Oh, John! what is it?"

"My beastly rheumatism. No, it isn't very bad. I've brought some stuff; I'll take it if it gets worse."

The path round the lake lay in the shade of a grove of young oak trees that looked old, for their slender trunks and branches were covered with long beards of grey lichen. Anne sat down on the deep carpet of vivid green moss, and John looked up at the great silver crags of the hill before he knelt by her side and put his arms round her.

"Anne dear! I love you too much to accept the sacrifice of your whole life."

"It isn't a sacrifice. I've run away with you to please myself."

"And to be an angel to me: and to annoy Gilbert a bit—eh?" His lips touched her cheek and felt it grow hot.

"We needn't consider Gilbert," she said quickly.

"How long ago did he—let you down?"

"Years ago. I'd rather not talk about it, please, John."

"It still hurts too much? Is that why?"

"Yes."

He was silent for a moment, then he took her hands in both of his.

"Anne darling—don't you know that you still *care*? You still love Gilbert, or he couldn't still hurt you!"

"I don't! He doesn't!" She protested vigorously

and drew back to look at him with reproachful lips and bewildered indignant eyes. "Haven't I *proved* to you that I don't care?"

"No, you haven't. Love can only be wounded when it is alive: if it were dead it wouldn't feel the pain."

"It isn't—love. It's my pride got hurt—of course—very naturally."

"I'm not sure that pride does get hurt by other people. I think one can only injure one's pride oneself. Vanity is different, other people can hurt that badly enough; but if Gilbert only hurt your vanity it wouldn't last so long, would it?"

"John! I won't be vivisected like this! It isn't fair, nor kind!"

"Yes it is. It is only fair to you, and kind, to face things clearly. It is very sporting of you to ride across country, and take fences without knowing what's the other side; but if I see you heading for a precipice I'm bound to shout."

"You're all wrong. Please believe what I say. Our marriage proved a mistake. Gilbert and I never really loved each other."

"That simply isn't true, my dear. Gilbert adored you."

"Well, he doesn't now."

"I can't quite believe that. I dare say he deserves kicking, most men do sometimes. But anyway, supposing Gilbert doesn't love you, what matters is that you still love him. . . . I know you do, dear. I knew it when I kissed you, when you flinched away from discussing him. I know it because I'm hurting you now this minute by touching on it. I hate hurting you, but it is better for you to know the truth."

She turned to him with a gesture of surrender, and bowed her head.

"I *did* love him, John. I've said I didn't because it made it easier to bear; but I did love and trust him, and he failed me. We quarrelled. I couldn't bear it: he hurt me so, and I tried to hurt him. I meant to. But my love for him is dead and buried, and I won't dig it up again. Please let it alone."

"But what if you buried it alive?"

"I don't care. Let it rest in peace."

"In peace! How can it be in peace if it's alive? Anne! you're such a child! I'd be a blackguard if I didn't try to be wise for you, but it is terribly difficult. I care for you so much that I want you to be happy more than I want happiness for myself, and you wouldn't be happy if you wrecked everything."

"Don't you realise, John, that what is wrecked is wrecked already? Gilbert did that."

"I realise that, but what I'm trying to put into words is that nothing can destroy what belongs to eternity. And love, my love for you, your love for Gilbert, his love for you, is there all the time. You can't ignore it as if it stopped dead and was done with. If matter is indestructible, so's spirit. I suppose that is the meaning of sacraments, a linking on to eternity. And anyway, what counts in one's soul is one's *own* love and loyalty and affection: that is what it hurts so to lose. I mean I could have borne the loss of your affection for me if we'd quarrelled, you and I, but if I'd lost my love for you I should have been a desolate, heart-broken man. If you were made of less sensitive, less fine stuff, Anne, it would be different. Some people don't love generously, but you're not like that. I know it; it is

what I love in you, and you mustn't kill it because it is you yourself."

"Are you telling me I ought to forgive Gilbert? I did. I don't bear ill-will. I've just passed on."

"Do you think that one-sided, conventional forgiveness means much? Because I don't. I don't see much sense in it. It is like trying to force a drink of cold water upon someone if they're not thirsty and don't want it. They're not grateful for it, and think you're a tiresome ass, most likely. If they're perishing of thirst it saves their life and reason, and means love and mercy. But it is no use if they don't want it. It isn't holy to be simply idiotic. Martyrs could be made of silly fools, but not saints."

"I don't see what you're driving at, John! I don't know whether I'm the less likely to be a saint or a martyr! I don't feel the smallest beginnings of either in me anywhere. They're neither the least in my line."

"I was speaking generally; but, as a matter of fact, you have got the raw material in you that saints are made of."

"John, you're really talking blasphemous nonsense!" He grinned cheerfully.

"That's the worst of a Calvinistic upbringing, it confuses the mind. Saints aren't born angels, they're developed out of human beings, and not always very well-behaved ones either, as far as I remember the history of the most effective ones. The raw human material is a strong will, and courage, and love of perfection—you've got all those: there are crowds of other things but they're spiritual and divine. I'm talking of human qualities."

"They're all the things which get me into hot

water. If I hadn't a strong will, and didn't dare do what I wanted to, and didn't want to snatch what I hadn't got, I dare say I should have behaved quite nicely and been a domestic success."

"You wouldn't have been you."

"If you want me to be a saint, John, you're too late!"

"I don't want you to make a mistake you'll suffer from."

"That is my look out. I've chosen."

"I don't mean your reputation, my dear. You tell me that you're ready to sacrifice it—that I'm to accept it. I don't mean forgiveness of Gilbert, nor faithfulness to him. It is your own self I'm thinking of. You see, when we give our love we've got to be ruled by the laws of love, or we suffer: so we mustn't be cruel, and we mustn't be weak. And the law behind all love is the doctrine of vicarious atonement, the central theory of Christian philosophy—and if we believe it, we can't only take it as a transcendental mystery that is no concern of ours, for it means we've got to bear the wrong those we love do, even if they do it to us. And bearing doesn't only mean enduring (we've got to do that any way, we can't help it), it means bearing it so that the burden of wrong isn't so heavy on them as it would be if we just gave in and let ourselves be crushed. If anyone we love makes a mistake, or commits a crime, we'd gladly undo it if we could, to spare them paying the penalty. Well, we've got to do that when the wrong done is to ourselves, because that is the only instance when we really have control. If we give our love to anyone, we give them the power of hurting us; if they use it and hurt us badly, we can't

help it ; but we can help how we bear it. It is a terrible revenge to take to *be* destroyed, to carry a spoilt life or a maimed spirit with us to the day of judgment and say, ' My friend, or my lover, or my child, did this thing to me ; the weapon was the love I gave him.' We can't help suffering ourselves, but we don't want those we love to suffer. I don't care a bit if Gilbert suffers on your account : he jolly well deserves to, and I hope he jolly well *will*. Serve him right ! That is my opinion, and it is all right if I stick to it. I don't love him, and that is what my brain says. But you're his wife, and though you may share that opinion with me intellectually, you won't feel that in your heart. When it came to the point and there was a penalty to be paid in spiritual suffering, you wouldn't wait to appear as his accuser, for him to be punished on your account as well as his own : no woman would ! ”

“ I'm not at all sure that I wouldn't,” retorted Anne. “ I think I'd rather like it ! ”

“ Then that proves you're not a woman yet—you're still a child ; and—and I'm not going to allow the child I love to make a ghastly mistake.”

CHAPTER XXIII

FRANCESCA travelled down from Scotland by the east coast route. She broke her journey to Norfolk at Durham and Lincoln to see the cathedrals, and then regretted that she had not allotted time to visit Peterborough and Ely again.

"One day," she thought to herself as she drove home from the station, "I shall coax Anne to do a round of cathedrals—Lincoln, York, Gloucester, Wells—and over to France—Rouen, Rheims, Châtres. Although she is so tiresome she has an exquisite appreciation of lovely things." Her mind was full of pictures of Gothic architecture when the car stopped at her open door, and she went into the hall, refreshingly cool and dim after the white heat of the August sunshine, and took up the letters that awaited her. The uppermost one was from John Halliday.

"MY DEAR MRS. WARING,

You will have heard that I've got my release. I hope I may come and see you soon? I've so much to thank you for. In the meantime I'm pretty seedy and not equal to London, nor work, nor anything strenuous, so I'm having a short holiday before taking up life again. I've turned into a Catholic, so a short sojourn in a Catholic country will be an opportunity for getting

used to some of the strangeness of it. Suffering, mental and physical, sharpens one's soul sometimes, and everyone needs a spiritual home. I wonder if every 'convert' feels rather a self-conscious fool *outwardly* when he mentions it? The ideal thing would be to be born a Catholic. Anyway you've always been so awfully decent to me that I can't help telling you where life has landed me. It is funny, but as a nation we are so queerly dumb about religion that I have not the least idea whether you'll be sympathetic or repelled by the step I've taken. Will you tell me when I see you? and pray forgive this egotistical letter.

Yours sincerely and gratefully,

JOHN HALLIDAY."

As she put the letter in her handbag she said gently and rather sadly: "Poor John! Well—it doesn't much matter I suppose." Then she opened a letter addressed in Anne's handwriting, and read:

"DEAREST FRANCESCA,

I'm afraid I'm going to give you the most awful shock, but when you get this letter I shall be in Ireland with John. He is so ill and has suffered so much that I couldn't let him go alone. He has had nothing but disappointments all his life and it isn't fair. He loves me much better than Gilbert ever has and I care for him awfully. If I'd married him I dare say I should have turned out much nicer. I'm always disappointing you; and Gilbert and I have made a failure of our marriage—so now he can get free and marry somebody else if he likes. Of course I shouldn't have done this if Phil had lived, because it wouldn't

have been fair on him. I'm sorry if this hurts you. You've always been awfully good to me really. But you believe in women's suffrage and divorce and all that, so perhaps you'll understand and see that I've done the right thing and forgive me in time. Please will you tell Gilbert? I don't want to be unkind, but it is too difficult to write to him.

ANNE."

Francesca sat down on the oak chest in the hall and tried to gather together her faculties which the perusal of these letters had scattered. Her thoughts seemed to be torn from her as leaves from a tree in an autumn hurricane, violently blown in all directions beyond her reach or control and with but remote possibilities of her ever being able to recall them. Possibly a tree at such moments feels despair—not only the despair of the immediate outrage and loss, but a hopeless, desperate sense of the vastness of effort and energy required to produce an entirely new set of leaves in order to live. She tried to force her brain to wrestle with the situation, but the thoughts it produced at the imperious command of her troubled soul were incompatible with each other. She found herself trying to think simultaneously that it was exactly like Anne, and startlingly and tragically unlike her: that Anne had always been impossible and selfish, and that she (Francesca) had always felt sure she would do something like this one day, and that Anne had always been a darling and that nobody could possibly have imagined her doing anything so wicked: her brain threatened to continue working like this indefinitely, like a merry-go-round at a fair, whirling round a

miscellaneous crowd of passengers, changing them every minute and not taking them anywhere. But the necessity of fulfilling the mission Anne had laid upon her of breaking the news to Gilbert, roused her to action. She mechanically ate some of the food prepared for her and caught the afternoon train to London.

Gilbert was out; but he arrived home at about seven o'clock in a mood of pleasurable exhilaration. He seemed delighted to find her there, and far more anxious to tell her his own news than to listen to anything she had to communicate to him.

"Hello! Francesca! This is very nice—when did you arrive? Anne never told me you were coming. Is she in? Never mind—I've got that appointment."

"What appointment?" His good spirits made her uncongenial task more difficult.

"Didn't you get my letter? I told you I'd hopes of getting into the legal department of the Treasury as an Assistant Registrar. Well, it is settled. I get a salary of seven hundred and fifty pounds, rising to a thousand pounds and the prospects of promotion and fifteen hundred pounds."

He was so pleased that he hardly noticed that Francesca's congratulations were brief and inadequate as he walked about the room whistling softly. He was building castles in the air, making fresh resolutions. It meant a great deal to him, this very dull appointment; it represented achievement and success, and the end of humiliating worries. He promised himself to forget all that was past; he would begin afresh. He would begin by having a really enjoyable holiday, he would go to Italy and

take Anne. After all it was foolish to allow Anne to keep him at arm's length any longer: he had given her plenty of time to get over anything that had upset her. They hadn't been away together for years—surely she could be bribed with the allurements of Venice and Florence, and there was no more charming companion than Anne when she wasn't sulking. He knew that he owed this appointment partly to her. Lawrence Ackroyd had exerted his influence to obtain it for him for Anne's sake. This led him to wonder where Anne was, and to try to remember whether she had informed him she was going away, and if so where. He wanted to tell her the news, he wanted to show her that he wasn't such a failure after all, he wanted to see her look pleased. Other people's congratulations were satisfying but normal, it would be a novel sensation to gratify Anne. Francesca didn't seem properly excited by his news; she looked pale and dejected.

"Gilbert, I've had a letter from Anne. I've come straight up with it. The most dreadful thing has happened. . . ."

"What is it? For God's sake don't try to break things gently! She hasn't got smashed up in a motor accident?"

"No, she's all *right*," with an emphasis that suggested she was all wrong. "But she has gone off to Ireland with John Halliday!"

"She *hasn't*?" The exasperation in Gilbert's voice told Francesca that he regarded this performance as a freak to be deprecated, but accepted as a normal part of Anne's programme.

"I'm afraid so. She has run away—you'd better read her letter. . . ."

He snatched it from her, and turned white as he read it.

Francesca leaned back in her chair and bit her lips while the tears rolled down her cheeks.

"There's a letter from John too—he never says a word. . . . I wouldn't have believed he'd be so deceitful."

"John!" Gilbert said contemptuously. "He's as weak as water. You don't suppose it is *his* doing, do you? I don't see Anne being run away with against her will by any man, let alone John, whom she could always twist round her little finger."

"She was always terribly selfish. . . ."

"I'm damned if I see what she gains by bolting with John—a man without a bob in the world, and neither health nor reputation, just out of gaol. Whoever could have imagined it of her? Whatever else it proves, it doesn't prove her selfishness that I can see—the silly little fool!" Gilbert spoke slowly and grimly, with an effort. "It isn't as if I'd bullied her, I've given her her head till she's lost it. I trusted her—I trusted in her sense—and she hasn't any. I suppose she is in one of her beastly tempers about something."

"She is outrageous; but she is still very young, Gilbert. Sometimes I think she grows younger instead of older, more like a naughty child, and that it must be our fault—that she has developed wrongly. I've been thinking, and I called at John's rooms on my way here to see if his landlady knew whereabouts he'd gone to, and he's left his full address for letters to be forwarded! If I went over there and saw Anne? Perhaps it would be some use. She might listen to me."

"I'm going myself," said Gilbert. "And I'll see that she *does* listen to me." He spoke with a sullen passionate note in his voice that Francesca had never heard before; she was afraid.

"But what shall you do if . . . if. . . Wouldn't it be better for me to go?"

"No, it would not. You've always been a fool about Anne!"

"I've always been fond of her," replied Francesca with forlorn sadness. "I've always felt she was capable of doing something rather wonderful!"

"I've no doubt she thinks she's done something remarkable now—and him too! Where's that damned Bradshaw?"

"Gilbert . . ."

"I'm not going to murder them, or any melodramatic rot like that," said Gilbert savagely; answering the troubled pleading anxiety painted on Francesca's face.

"But Gilbert—the letter is dated four days ago. What are you going for?"

"How can I tell till I get there?"

He was irritated by Francesca's concentration on Anne. *He* would deal with Anne when he found her. At present he was only concerned with himself, his own distaste, disgrace, and disappointment. Anne had spoiled everything.

He was glad to escape from the house with a hurriedly packed portmanteau, from Francesca's tearful wretched face. Anne was ungrateful, heartless, wanton . . . it was a poor satisfaction he got from applying critical epithets to her, something like feeding a starving parched body with crumbs of dry biscuit. If he could have Anne in his grasp, in his

power, to shake her, to seize her physically and shake her until he had exhausted his desire to shake her—that was the only thing that would do him any good. He thought of her as something strong and terrible and powerful; she had the power to rouse all the emotions that he despised in other people and resented and feared in his own soul—the ugly, crude, primitive emotions that belonged to savages and children, not to respectable legal officials with responsible positions. Children got into passions and expressed them by irrational physical violence—children and the uneducated adults of the lower classes. He, Gilbert Trevor, barrister-at-law and Assistant Registrar, couldn't behave like a child or a drunken miner. He felt a fierce irritation with himself as well as with Anne. Of course it would serve Anne right if he didn't mind what she did, but he did mind; he minded sharply and bitterly.

As the Irish mail bore him to Holyhead he tried to decide what he was going to do and say. He might begin by thrashing John: he dismissed that idea, it would be cowardly to thrash John, besides Anne was such a heartless little beast he wasn't at all sure she'd mind if he did.

He could cast Anne out of his life. He faced the prospect alone in a comfortable first-class smoking carriage, and it didn't appeal to him. He said he should dislike the scandal, a tormenting imp in his memory said he would hate the succeeding dullness worse—he would miss Anne. He could marry again, he assured himself—someone who would behave much better than Anne had ever behaved; someone who would really suit him; someone with whom he could settle down placidly, who would

respect his authority, be a docile mother of the children he desired. The little imp countered this with presentations of Anne's possible successors, a series of colourless, featureless specimens of feminine insipidity. These phantoms all behaved irreproachably as the Irish mail shot northwards through pale corn fields, but Gilbert wanted none of them; in fact his wrath against Anne flamed to a fiercer life for consigning him to such a fate, to such irritating consolation. Why the devil couldn't Anne behave? She despised him, that was why she had dared to defy him. He had been weak with her—far too indulgent; he had spoilt her. Everyone had spoilt her. Well, he would resort to other methods, he would show her that he was to be reckoned with, that she wasn't the only possessor of a temper. He promised himself to be brutal if necessary.

She deserved to suffer and he wouldn't spare her. He didn't visualise the brutal unsparing methods he proposed adopting with Anne, when he found her. He left them vague, unsculptured statues in the unquarried marble of his imagination; he just satisfied himself by knowing they were there, as a sculptor views an unhewn block—only possibly the sculptor has evolved a clay model and Gilbert hadn't got as far as that yet. His determination was his chisel, he sharpened it; and his anger was his hammer, he kept testing it and rejoicing in its weight. He was quite pleased when minor annoyances occurred on his journey to keep his temper at white heat—when the boat was uncomfortably crowded at Holyhead; and when the train at Kingstown had not waited for the mail and there wasn't another for some hours; and when he arrived at noon at

Rathgorm station and found that Ballytyrone was eight miles away and there was no vehicle available to convey him there.

A sympathetic porter interested himself in his predicament.

"It is the cattle-fair at Glendrum, and every hoof and wheel in Rathgorm has legged it away there these two hours, for there's horse-racing. There's me wife's cousin's red pony, but he's as lame as a one-legged duck and no more pace in him than an ould turkey-hin, or it's him would be racing with the best of thim. I doubt if he'd get you to Ballytyrone, the hills would break his heart."

"I've got to get to the place somehow."

"You rist yourself in patience in the shade outside here on the high road. Maybe there'll be a cart or something passing presently."

"I'll walk." Gilbert eyed the dusty road and his bag with disfavour.

"Surely the warmth of the day and the hills of the roads will destroy ye entirely," said the porter amiably.

A thick cloud of dust suddenly appeared at the end of the deserted street, with a few scurrying chickens whirling from it like planets out of chaos in diagram demonstrations of the nebular hypothesis. The porter let forth a shrill—"Hi! Hi!" and the nucleus of the dust nebula, a small Ford car, drew up with a jerk that rattled its component parts with a sound as of castanets. The occupant of the car, a round-faced man in a shabby flannel suit and a straw hat, gazed enquiringly round, having first glanced anxiously at the ground under his wheels. The porter sauntered across the road to him, and,

after a brief colloquy, returned to Gilbert and picked up his bag.

"It's the doctor, Dr. Blacker ; he's going round by Ballytyrone and will journey you there."

Gilbert rewarded his friend for the introduction with silver and expressed his gratitude to the doctor.

"This is uncommonly good of you."

"Not the least bit. Company is hard to come by in this part of the world. You'll not mind waiting at the cross roads while I have a squint at a whitlow and a dislocated shoulder ? "

Gilbert was a silent companion ; but there was no need for him to speak, the doctor was charmed to do all the talking himself, and to supply all the laughter his conversation required to lubricate it. Gilbert observed the scenery as he noticed the stones in the road as the car bumped over them, with his senses ; his mind was entirely concentrated upon framing his forthcoming conversation with Anne. He had thought of harsh words and scathing sentences and was afraid of forgetting some of them, or of not delivering them with sufficient force. In all such mental rehearsals of premeditated interviews it is a help to be able to forecast both parts of the dialogue, but Gilbert was quite unable to imagine what Anne would say ; he could only be sure of his own part. The doctor's monologue became clinical ; he strove to entertain his passenger with accounts of his patients' more exciting pathological experiences, and Gilbert welcomed the halt at the cross roads. When the doctor restarted the car he said :

"It is to Kavanagh's you're going at Ballytyrone ? Ah ! you'll find them a bit upset yet. Sad case there—young Englishman staying there for a holiday

—had had rheumatic fever which had left a weak heart behind in him. He felt rheumatic pains and instead of sending for me he doses himself with salicylic acid: good for rheumatism of course, infernally bad for hearts.”

“Is he better?”

“He is not. He was dead when I got there.”

“Dead! John Halliday dead?”

“Then you knew him? I’m sorry if he was a friend of yours. It is a great shock for you. But with his heart in that state of weakness he ought to have been under a doctor. There was nothing to be done. When my time comes may I die so gently and quickly. He was buried yesterday—God rest his soul in peace.”

Gilbert sat stunned, confusedly striving to find reasons for not believing what he knew to be true—the first protective instinct of the human mind reeling under the shock of bad news. They had arrived. He got out, thanked the doctor, and was greeted by Mrs. Kavanagh.

“You have an English lady staying here?”

“Yes, sir, if it is Mrs. Trevor you mean?”

“Yes, can I see her?”

“Surely she’ll be proud and pleased, sir,” said Mrs. Kavanagh amiably; “and maybe it will do her good. You’ll find her up the stairs in the sitting-room with ‘private’ painted on the door, the first you come to.”

It seemed mean to take advantage of the woman’s trustfulness to spring a surprise upon Anne, but he brushed the scruple aside, ran upstairs and knocked at the door marked “Private.” As there was no answer he opened the door and looked in. Anne

was lying limply in an uncomfortable arm-chair. Her face was white and drawn and there were black semicircles under her closed eyes. She opened them for a moment, looked at him with a painful expression of bewildered surprise, and then shut them as if the effort of opening them hurt her. She made an attempt to move, but desisted and lay still again.

"You've got one of your bad headaches!" he said.

"Yes," she whispered faintly.

"You ought to be in bed. No, don't try to talk."

"I can't—I feel sick."

She moved her hand to wave him away. He looked out into the passage. There was no one about. He could hear Mrs. Kavanagh's voice downstairs, outside in the distance. Through an open door at the end of the passage he saw some of Anne's possessions; he investigated further and discovered it was indubitably her bedroom. He went back to her.

"You'd be more comfortable on your bed."

"I'm all right here. I don't want to move."

"Don't, I'll carry you."

He lifted her very carefully, carried her to her room and gently laid her on the bed. He knew exactly what to do for her. He took the hairpins out of her heavy mass of hair, searched among the bottles on her dressing-table till he found some sal-volatile, mixed some and made her drink it. Then he soaked a handkerchief in eau-de-Cologne laid it on her forehead, covered her up, and darkened the room by pulling down a broken blind. He found Mrs. Kavanagh and engaged a room for the night.

During the afternoon he looked in at Anne at intervals, but she lay in a little crumpled heap, half dazed with pain, until she fell asleep.

In the evening he went to the little churchyard and stood by John's grave, and then he walked up and down by the lake for a long time in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE next morning when Mrs. Kavanagh brought him his breakfast she informed him that Anne was better. "But not rising her head from the pillow, and her face as white as the clane sheets and them linen."

"She's had a bad shock," he said. He was so sorry for her that he rather shirked seeing her. He wondered whether it would be more merciful if he went away and left her alone; but he had to see her, so he decided that it would be kinder to wait. "Try and persuade her to stay in bed and take some food. And ask her to let me know when she's ready to see me." Mrs. Kavanagh returned with a somewhat crestfallen countenance.

"She says she's heart-scalded to disappoint you, but it is her bath she's wanting, and if it was Dublin Castle itself come to see her she'd keep it waiting the same way, with no disrespect for yourself."

So Gilbert judged that Anne had sent no message at all, and that Mrs. Kavanagh was shocked and driven to imaginative flights of politeness on her own account.

He spent a restless day wandering aimlessly about the tiny hamlet in a mood of intense sadness. Late in the afternoon he was so bored and depressed that, in a spasm of weary curiosity, he looked into the

little church in search of a moment's distraction. The stone floor, the distempered walls discoloured in patches by damp, the tawdry painted statues, made up an unattractive interior. On the altar, and before the images, were chipped glass vases full of bunches of flowers from cottage gardens, crudely arranged ; a few thin candles were alight and guttering before a blue and white plaster figure of the Virgin and Child, and an old woman knelt there, a ragged, poverty-stricken figure. She rose as Gilbert stood there, and she turned away with a face so placid and peaceful that he felt a pang of envy. She went out, and Gilbert, alone in the little chapel, suddenly knelt on the shabby strip of carpet, laid his arms on the altar rails and bowed his head on his arms. Silently, half subconsciously, he prayed, and his prayer, if he had translated it into words, would have shocked him ; for he was conventional to the marrow of his soul, and the gist of his prayer was : " I don't believe in religion much. I don't know if there is any God to hear me. And this church is a ridiculous place. But I'm a rotter, and if there is a God He must see me as a puny rotter ; but I'm unhappy. I want back everything I've lost. I want another chance. I don't want to die like poor old John. I want Anne. I want her love again. I want a fresh start. Oh God ! If you'll only give me what I want I shall find it much easier to believe in You ; and if I believed in You I should find it much easier to be a better man, less selfish, less weak. . . ."

As he knelt there in silence he did not hear a very light step at the church door, did not see Anne standing on the threshold for a moment. She paused,

saw him kneeling there and, as softly as a little ghost, drew back and went swiftly away.

Half an hour later, when he returned to the inn, Mrs. Kavanagh told him that Anne was out.

"She got up and came down, and wint out of the garden. I surely thought you'd meet her."

"I didn't," he said listlessly. He sat down to the evening meal that was ready for him. The girl who waited on him said :

"Michael Henry says he saw the lady walking up yon hill."

The hill, indicated by the brandished dish of potatoes, was covered with heather and bracken and blackberry bushes, and rough sheep-tracks led round its steep sides. It occurred to Gilbert that Anne might lose her way ; she had no sense of direction, and the sun was setting. He decided to go and find her. He requested Mrs. Kavanagh to leave the door unlocked in case he came in late, but it seemed that the door was not in the habit of being locked at nights. He wondered if Anne had eaten a proper amount of food ; he put some biscuits in his pocket, and seeing a knitted coat of hers lying on the chair, he threw it over his arm. It was like Anne to go out without her coat, said uneasily-stirring memories that were too tender to bear touching, except very gently.

A collie, released from ill-defined duties in the yard, followed him at a distance, in the detached, determined yet deprecating way uninvited dogs endeavour to divert attention from their own firm intention of inflicting their company upon unsociable pedestrians.

Gilbert followed the most direct path up the mountain-side. He knew it was no use looking

for Anne on his way. If she set out to go up a hill she would go to the top. It took him nearly three-quarters of an hour to reach the crest of the hill—a wild, lonely place, where gorse bushes stood like dark rocks in a purple sea of heather. Any human figure within half a mile could have been seen against the clear level light of the after-glow, though the sun had set; but there was no sign nor sound of life except the distant soft whurr-oo-oo of an owl, until Tim, the collie, bounding over the deep heather for the sheer joy of leaping, stopped by a gorse-bush a hundred yards away, wagging his tail and barking inquisitively. Gilbert made his way through a tangle of bracken and blackberry vines and whinberry bushes, and there, lying hidden by the knee-deep heather lay Anne, sobbing uncontrollably as he had never seen her cry before, and as if she had been crying for hours. She made no sign of having heard him so he sat down on a slab of granite a yard or two away and waited for her to stop. He waited for what seemed to him a long time. Her sobbing went on till he could bear it no longer. He knelt by her side and laid his hand on her shoulder.

“Anne—you’ll make yourself ill if you cry any more. You—you must try to stop. . . .” He felt for words with awkward gentleness. “It’s awfully hard for you . . . losing John . . . but he’d hate you to cry like this.”

She didn’t shrink from his touch, he could feel the long shuddering sobs shake her whole slender frame. He took his travelling-flask from his pocket, poured some wine into its silver cup and put it to her lips. She drank a little and made an effort to speak through her tears.

"It isn't only John," she sobbed. "It isn't only John, though he's the only friend I've got who really cares. . . . I think he is happiest out of a beastly world. . . . It is everything. . . . I've made such a *mess* of everything."

"You have rather; but it won't help to make yourself ill." She was crying more quietly; he sat down in the heather by her side and waited. He made no attempt to touch her or comfort her. Presently she said:

"You can divorce me if you like—only don't think wrong things about John. You mustn't bring him into it—but I won't defend myself. And I don't mind what you say to me. You can say what you like."

"Look here, my dear," he said nervously. "If you imagine I've come after you to play the virtuous indignant husband you're making a mistake. If you've made a mess of things, so have I—rather a heart-breaking mess. And I've—I've not much to say for myself."

There was a long silence between them. The northern light faded, and the sky darkened to deep blue as the stars came out and night settled down on the hills like a great visible calm on troubled waters, effacing colours and contours and all restless, vivid details. Anne never moved. He thought she slept, and, wondering if she were cold, he spread the woollen wrap over her; but she wasn't asleep, she whispered a faint "Thank you." He wondered whether she was going to remain where she was all night, she seemed too exhausted to move. The dog, after making a tour of general inspection all round, intimated that all was well with the hill, that

there was nothing to detain a conscientious dog any longer, and that he was bored and going home.

Gilbert leant back against the granite crag and tried to think out what he was going to say—there was so much he had in his mind, so much to talk out, to be explained away, to ask. Yet, as the time passed, and more stars came out, and the silence and solitude and mystery of the night soaked into his soul like a healing soothing water, his desire to talk left him. The long, quiet moments of their presence together there submerged all possible arguments, and explanations, and appeals, mere affairs of words, as the waves of a rising tide gradually drown in their depths the scattered stones and broken castles on sands where children have been playing; or as a supreme artist will efface futile irrelevancies from a finished work.

Little winds passed over the hill, sometimes warm from sheltered sun-soaked valleys, sometimes cool from oases of shade or running water, but they were as soft and slow as the few clouds that drifted across the sky; and neither breezes nor clouds broke the calmness and placid silence of the night, both resembled the rhythmical breath of the sleeping world.

After a long time Anne gave a deep quivering sigh that was half a sob. Gilbert bent over her and found that she had fallen into a sleep of utter exhaustion. He was afraid she would catch cold: very cautiously and carefully he lay down beside her in the heather, slipped an arm under her, and, without waking her, tucked the woollen coat round her and drew her into the shelter of his own broad shoulders. She just moved her head into a more comfortable position against his coat and relaxed again utterly, with

the confiding nestling movement of a very weary child. Gilbert laid his cheek on her hair and fell asleep too. He drowsed fitfully. Once she gave a little sharp frightened cry, and started in her sleep, and he murmured: "It's all right, dear—it's all right," and held her close, and she slipped back into her dreams.

She was still asleep when he woke some hours later. The first colourless light of dawn was in the eastern sky, and the whole earth appeared to be shrouded in grey curtains. Then an arc of pale pink colour crept above the horizon and the greyness of the rest of the round world deepened in contrast, but the greyness of the sky melted into blue, and, as the stars overhead vanished, little stars emerged out of the darkness on the ground, first tiny sparks of white, then little yellow flowers, and the shrouding curtains of night receded as a faint wind rose as if to blow them away. The illumined circle of light enlarged, but Gilbert had the impression that the sun was rising to shine just on himself and Anne—the rest of the world was asleep and a-dream in the valleys, tucked away under the grey quilt of darkness that now, with the full dawn in the sky, was not darkness, but merely the absence of light, until the sunlight appeared over the edge of the world and flooded the hills with colour and vitality.

Anne woke suddenly, like a child, and sat up, rubbing her eyes. Her face was pale and tear-stained, her eyelids red and swollen. Her hair was dishevelled and her dress crumpled and covered with crumbs of heather and bracken: she look a piteous little mortal.

She glanced at Gilbert with nervous apprehension. She had given him an unequalled opportunity for

denouncing her. He had not taken it when she was ill, nor last night when she was worn out, and she was grateful to him; but now she did not expect him to spare her, and every fibre in her spirit shrank from censure or reproaches as a wounded body dreads an ungentle touch. He read the dread in her sore, sensitive mind, and, to reassure her, he said in a matter-of-fact voice :

“ Aren’t you awfully hungry ? Wouldn’t you like some biscuits ? ”

“ Have you got any ? ”

“ I have—some of ’em have got broken though.” He turned out his pockets, and they ate the biscuits, and some sweet ripe whinberries that grew in profusion among the heather. When they had finished the inadequate meal, he rose and said : “ If you’re ready I suppose we’d better return to civilisation, baths and breakfast.”

He picked up her hat for her and shook two spiders off it. She felt her hair and tried to pin it into some sort of order and they found the path.

Thin, purely-white mists were floating away from the earth, leaving it sparkling with jewels of moisture that bediamonded the short fine grass under their feet.

The joyous, clear, clean morning air gave Anne fresh courage. The storm of forlorn misery that had beaten her down had passed—and Gilbert had come to her, and watched over her, and stayed with her, and had refrained from uttering one harsh word. She wanted to match his magnanimity. Everything that was generous in her nature yearned for expression, but she was shy, and had a curious conviction that any words would break the subtle but strong

spell that the silence under the night stars seemed to have woven between them, that they should not hurt each other. So she didn't speak ; but as they came to a steep curve in the path she slipped her hand into his. He gripped her little soft fingers firmly, steadied her steps down the slippery incline, and then put an arm round her, drew her to him and kissed the pale, sad, and not very clean face she held up. Then, as her eyes were filling with tears, he gently kissed her again, at the corner of her mouth, and said, with a queer jerk in his voice :

"Do you know you're all stained with whinberry juice ? "

Whereupon she insisted upon kneeling down by a trickle of water, and washing her face, and borrowing his handkerchief to dry it, for hers was useless.

At the inn, Mrs Kavanagh had not been at all concerned by her visitors' absence. She conveyed the impression that, though genially disposed towards all men, she was too deeply immersed in cares of importance to be disturbed by the vagaries of mere English tourists. Anne stared in disgust at the be-draggled, tear-stained apparition in her glass.

"I shouldn't have kissed anyone looking like that if I'd been Gilbert," she reflected. "I suppose he really must be fond of me."

She appeared at breakfast, still pale, but composed and with her usual air of self-possession, the air that a consciousness of carefully chosen clothes can bestow externally even if the subject clothed is shy and unhappy.

"I must telegraph to Francesca," Gilbert said. "Shall I tell her we'll be home to-morrow, or are you too tired to start to-day ? "

“ I’m not tired.”

They had to pack and catch the train ; and, as they had to spend hours in Dublin, Gilbert hired a jaunting-car and they saw the sights. He detested sightseeing in a hurry, but thought it would be good for Anne to be tired out, and they nearly missed the boat-train, because Anne, whether she was happy or unhappy, could never be coaxed away from anything in which she was interested.

The inevitable reaction came later. When they stood together on the deck of the mail-boat, watching the surging water widen between them and the Kingstown lights, Anne had a mood of desolation, and a momentary wild desire to communicate it to Gilbert : she wanted him to share her bitter knowledge that quarrels that sear and wound leave scars that ache, even after they are healed. She fought the impulse and conquered it. She was not sure enough of their relationship of reconciliation to jeopardise it ; besides, she did not want to hurt Gilbert’s feelings for the sake of relieving her own. She yielded up her will, and immediately felt a strange surprise that the struggle was so easy.

CHAPTER XXV

FRANCESCA awaited them nervously; but when they arrived and she discerned that they were both more nervous than she was, her common sense asserted its authority, and she exerted herself to divest the occasion of awkwardness. Gilbert's telegram had given her her cue, and her own affection made it easy and natural for her to take Anne straight into her arms. The only strangeness was due to Anne's unnatural docility. When Gilbert declared she was worn out and ought to go to bed, she meekly acquiesced.

"She looks very ill," Francesca observed, alone with Gilbert.

"Go to her presently. Perhaps she'll talk to you. We—we've made it all right," he said slowly, "but it is difficult for her. She's come up against something that has hurt her badly and I'm not the right person to help her. I rather think it would help her to talk about John, and she can't do that to me, yet."

Francesca looked at him curiously: she had an uncanny feeling that a new, changed brother had come back to her. She went upstairs. Anne was in bed. She greeted Francesca with:

"Well?" and contrived to make the monosyllable convey defiance, a deprecating plea for a

merciful judgment, hostility, a yearning for affection, suspicion, and trustfulness.

"My dear, you must be very tired. Gilbert tells me you've not been to bed for two nights. Why not, I cannot imagine. It seems very bad management."

"What does it matter?" Anne rejoined with weary impatience.

"You're worn out. Does your head ache?"

"No. My mind does though. . . . Francesca . . ."

"Well?"

In Francesca's "well" was sympathy, discretion, and patience, with a human curiosity lurking underneath.

Anne was lying flat on her back, her hands behind her head, her small face framed by her two long heavy plaits of hair. She looked very like a small worried child who had been sent to bed in disgrace. Anne's curiosity was either livelier or less disciplined.

"What is in your mind?" she asked restlessly.

"What are you thinking about?"

Francesca smiled tenderly; it was so like Anne to do preposterous things and then yearn for approbation.

"I'm very glad to have you back, dear."

Underneath Anne's uppermost characteristics was a solid strata of honesty, she turned away and hid her face in her pillow.

"I want to tell you what happened," she said in a muffled voice. "I was sorry for John. . . ."

"I think I understand, Anne dear."

"No you don't. Nobody could understand a selfish little beast like me."

"You couldn't bear him to go away alone, he was so ill and lonely. . . ."

"And a Catholic."

"Anne dearest—there I don't follow you!—One . . . one doesn't run away with a man because he's a Catholic."

"I did. I thought he must be so miserable to become one and I hated feeling he'd gone where I couldn't follow him. He was *my* friend and—and . . ."

"And so you determined to try conclusions with the Catholic Church? Really, Anne dearest, you are . . ."

Francesca sat down in a chair by the bedside and gave up a search for words.

"Are you shocked or something?" came from the depths of the pillow.

"I'm only puzzled."

"And it wasn't only that I was sorry for John, I was sorry for myself. Gilbert didn't want me, and it seemed such a waste of me if John did! Besides I thought I'd be happier with John. He never minded what I did, he always thought I was perfect. So I went. But when we got there, it wasn't at all as I thought it would be. He tried to make me see that I wasn't really in love with him—that it was always Gilbert, even when we quarrelled: and I didn't *want* to see it. It made me feel a fool and a failure. I didn't want to be treated like a child after I'd burnt all my boats and run away with him. It annoyed me. It was all my dreadful vanity—I couldn't bear to admit I was wrong and I couldn't bear John to behave as if he were my grandfather. I wanted him not to be able to resist me. He was

determined not to compromise me. After he'd gone to bed, I thought and I thought, and I suddenly put on my dressing-gown and went to his room to tell him he was all wrong—and when I got there he was ill, and he thought I'd come to take care of him. I called the woman and she sent for the doctor and the priest. But it was no use. He died."

"He didn't die alone. You were with him."

"Yes: but I . . . I tried to tell him I would try to be good—as good as he thought I was, but I don't know whether he heard . . . and then Gilbert came and was kind. I'd almost rather he'd knocked me down—not for anything I'd done to him, but for the way I'd behaved to John—I wasn't fair to him. I oughtn't to be pitied and petted. I ought to be treated with contempt. I can't tell Gilbert; so I've made myself tell you."

Anne turned her head and there was an expression of pain and humiliation in her face that moved Francesca profoundly.

"Do you know why you can't tell Gilbert?"

"Because I won't, I suppose."

"Because John was right: you can't bear Gilbert to think hard things of you. You do care for him."

There was thankfulness in Francesca's voice.

"I've made *you* think hard things of me."

"Not very hard things, my dear. Besides, if you came and confessed you'd committed a murder my instinct would be to find excuses for you."

"I wonder why."

"Because I love you, I suppose."

She stooped to kiss her and Anne's arms were round her neck.

Francesca had her heart's desire. She had Gilbert again, and Anne was restored to her; yet she was dissatisfied as the days passed. There was a tense, inexplicable sense of strain in the household, which was not attributable to any fault of Anne's, because Anne was unnaturally and angelically good. A little listlessly, but humbly and meekly docile, she took her part in the family with the painfully self-conscious, almost extravagantly exemplary behaviour of a conscientious child who has been let off a richly deserved chastisement and wishes the world to bear witness to a complete reformation. When this mood had lasted for a week Francesca expressed her fears that Anne was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. She broached the matter after breakfast one hot morning when she and Gilbert were sitting in the shade of the cedar tree, dividing *The Times* between them. Anne had wandered off and was engaged in the virtuous occupation of ridding a hedge of sweet-peas of seed-pods.

"It is too hot for her in the sun," Francesca observed. "Gilbert, she really can't be well. It isn't *like* her to be so—so pathetically quiet and thoughtful. She has suffered, poor child. I'm sure it is affecting her health. Don't you think we'd better persuade her to see a doctor?"

"I don't think you need worry; she won't be able to keep it up much longer. She's just being a reformed character and she's overdoing it. It must be a bit of a strain."

He threw down *The Times* and strolled towards the flower garden calling to her:

"Anne! I say Anne! Stop playing undergardener and come out of the sun." To his mild

surprise she obediently put down her scissors and basket and came to him. He took her arm and piloted her down a path in the shade of a yew hedge.

"Anne! You're being very sweet and very good, but you're rather getting on our nerves."

"I am?"

"Yes. I don't feel quite comfortable. You're a bit of a changeling. Where's the little devil I married?"

"I hope she's dead. I'd like to think she died that night on the hill at Wicklow."

He stopped and laid both hands on her shoulders, drawing her to him.

"But I wouldn't. I . . . I want her back! Anne, that night you said John was the only friend you'd got who really cared—that wasn't true, my dear. Aren't I your friend? Don't I care?"

"Do you?"

He kissed her, then she hid her face against his arm.

"Gilbert—let me talk. I want to tell you. I—I'm not sorry I went to Ireland with John. If I've made you imagine that I've acted a lie. . . ."

"I never thought that. I know you too well. He was a better man than I am, I know that: but you didn't go with him because you hated me. You were sorry for him."

"My motives are always so mixed up. If there is a good one it gets all tangled up with bad ones. John told me I went partly to be beastly to you. It was partly that, mostly for John's sake, and partly because I thought you'd really be rather glad to get rid of me."

"What a little ass you can be!"

"Well, you could easily have married someone better."

"Did you want me to?"

"No: of course not."

"Then I don't understand . . ."

"Neither do I. John seemed to understand, but then he believed marriage is a sacrament."

She looked up at him. "Gilbert, I did care awfully for John. I was prepared to throw up everything to give him a share of happiness and it all went wrong. I just worried and dismayed him really. It always did if I behaved badly. And now I feel I ought to be miserable always, just to punish myself, but one can't be miserable without punishing other people too—and that isn't fair."

"No—it isn't fair, and it wouldn't be fair to poor old John. I mean, it isn't what he'd want, and if he knows, it would make him miserable too."

"The only alternative is to come back to you and behave like a perfect lady and be happy, and that seems so selfish."

"It isn't. It is selfishness, I suppose, that wrecks happiness, especially in marriage. I fancy happiness is a responsibility, as much as money." His voice shook with nervousness; it was difficult for him to break down his reserve. He had meant to confide in Anne some of the thoughts that were stirring in his heart, but he had fancied he would choose one evening in the secrecy of darkness: however, Anne had chosen the searching daylight of ten o'clock in the morning and he went on doggedly, "One ought to take care of it, share it, but be willing to make sacrifices to keep it—and hold it in trust to hand on to one's children."

"No children could be quite so darling as Phil! They might be as pretty, and as naughty and sweet," she said with wistful decision. "I'd like five!"

"Good Lord, Anne, darling!"

Francesca, left to herself, gave but intermittent attention to the important events of both hemispheres chronicled in the newspaper she was reading; her anxious mind was at the other side of the dark hedge with Gilbert and Anne, until a sound reached her that broke the long, unhappy tension and gave her a blessed reassurance that set her heart at rest—they were both laughing.

THE END

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